

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Fall 1997

Volume 25 Number 1

- 3 Robert D. Sacks The Book of Job: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 15–29
- 37 Waldemar Hanasz Poetic Justice for Plato's Democracy?
- 59 Bob Chase John Locke and Cultural Relativism
- 91 Thomas S. Schrock Anachronism All Around: Quentin Skinner on Francisco Suarez
- Discussion*
- 125 Hilail Gildin Déjà Jew All Over Again: Dannhauser on Leo Strauss and Atheism
- Review Essay*
- 135 Will Morrisey The Character of Modern Republicanism, Review Essay on *Revolutions Revisited*, by Ralph Lerner; *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* and *The Ennobling of Democracy*, by Thomas L. Pangle; *The Learning of Liberty*, by Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas Pangle; and *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, by Michael Zuckert

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 •
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, E-Mail and telephone. Contributors using computers
should, if possible, provide a character count of the entire manuscript. Please send
FOUR 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.) Joan Walsh, 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 on Chapters 15–29

ROBERT D. SACKS

St. John's College, Santa Fe

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: **2** “Should a wise man even answer such blustery thoughts and fill his own belly with the east wind? **3** Should he argue with such useless words and idle talk that goes nowhere? **4** You have abandoned FEAR and deserted the grounds of all discourse with God.¹ **5** Your perversion has taught your mouth and you have chosen a crafty tongue. **6** Your own mouth condemns you, not I, and your own lips have testified against you.

7 Were you the first man (*‘adam*) to be born? Did you come writhing into being² before the hills? **8** Have you been listening in on God’s secret council? Why, you have set all wisdom aside for yourself. **9** What do you know that we do not know or understand that we are not able to?³ **10** Both the hoary-headed and the aged are among us, more resplendent in days than your father. **11** Are the compassions of God and His gentle words too meager for you? **12** What has taken hold of your heart and so dazzled⁴ your eyes, **13** that you have turned your spirit on God and dredged such words up out of your mouth? **14** What is a mortal that he should be clean or one born of woman that he should consider himself just?⁵ **15** He puts no trust in His Holy Ones and even the heavens are not clean in His sight. **16** And what of that abhorred and corrupted one, man, who drinks up injustice like water!⁶

17 I will show you. Listen to me! This thing have I seen and will relate, **18** a thing which the wise have reported from their fathers and have not withheld. **19** To them alone has the land been given, and no stranger has gone among them.

20 The guilty man writhes in pain⁷ all his days and the number of his years lies hidden from those who can terrorize. **21** Sounds of fear are always in his ear. When he is at ease a robber will fall upon him. **22** He can have no trust that he will return from the darkness, and he is ever on guard against a sword. **23** He wanders for bread, not knowing where. He knows only that the day of darkness is ready at hand. **24** Narrowness and anguish oppress him. They overwhelm him like a king set for battle, **25** for he has stretched out his hand against God, and

The first fourteen chapters of the translation and commentary appeared in Volume 24, Numbers 2 and 3 of *Interpretation*. The balance will appear in future issues.

4 · Interpretation

played the hero against the Almighty. 26 Neck down, he charges against Him with his thickly-bossed shield. 27 His face is covered with fat and his haunches are bloated.⁸

28 He dwells in cities of desolation, in houses not to be lived in and bound for the trash heap. 29 He will not become rich. What wealth he does have will not last, nor will his possessions spread themselves over the earth. 30 He will not be turned from the darkness, but a flame turned aside by the breath of his own mouth will dry up his young saplings. 31 Let him not trust in deceitful nothing for his compensation will be nothing.⁹

32 He will be finished before his time. His fronds will never turn to moisty green,¹⁰ 33 but like a vine he will cruelly cast off his unripe grapes and reject his own blossoms like the olive, 34 for the congregation of the polluted is a barren place; and the tents of bribery are a consuming fire. 35 They conceive toil and give birth to wickedness. Their belly brews deceit.”¹¹

Comments

1. For Eliphaz, the FEAR of God is the grounds of all discourse with God, and earlier he had called it “your surety, and your hope, the simplicity of your ways.” How are we to understand the relation between FEAR and speech? Had not Job claimed the very opposite? “Remove Your hand from me, and let not your terror frighten me. Then summon me up and I will reply, or let me speak and You shall give answer.”

Job wishes to speak with God in terms of the highest human goals. This means, in effect, to abandon the concept of perversion in favor of notions of right and wrong, of the just and the unjust. Job, then, wants human discourse, a discourse in which the human voice is heard. If another voice is to be heard, it must be heard in another way. It must be held in awe rather than followed by thought.

2. The Revised Standard’s “Were you brought forth before the hills?” is not good enough. The word is a very complicated one and we shall hear of it again. A fuller account of it can be found in the note to verse 1 of Chapter 39, but even now we can see that Eliphaz is accusing Job of believing that in anguish and pain he pulled himself into being, and that he owes no debt to the past because he received nothing from the past. He is older than the mountains, stands on his own feet, and the baseness of his origins is his pride and not his shame. He is, in fact, claiming to be wisdom, if not God himself:

Pro. 8:12 I, wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.
 . . . The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. When there were no depths I was “brought forth,” when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was “brought forth”;

Psa. 90:2 Before the mountains were “brought forth,” or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

3. He is indeed accusing Job of pretending to know the primordial secret.

4. The root *rz*m is unknown outside of this verse. The Revised Standard has “Why do your eyes flash” but Greenberg has “How your eyes have failed you.”

The Arabic cognate means, among many other things “to be in continual movement” or “to agitate.” This is the lexicographical foundation for my translation.

5. In many ways this is Eliphaz’s most cutting argument. Underlying Job’s commitment to the surface world is the notion that no matter how narrowly limited the horizons of that world may be, whatever scraps they contain are sufficiently connected to things presently unseen, that by pursuing them and the questions they raise in their own inadequacy, they can lead beyond themselves to a wider and more complete understanding of oneself and the world in which one lives.

By saying “What has taken hold of your heart and so dazzled your eyes that you have turned your spirit on God and dredged such words up out of your mouth,” Eliphaz admits that Job has not simply and negatively turned him from God, but that something of human concern has “dazzled his eyes.”

This is, perhaps, Eliphaz’s deepest insight into the nature of human thought. For a fuller explanation of what I mean by that, see the note to 30:17.

Eliphaz has somehow vaguely seen that each man is always caught up within one horizon or another. What they do not see is a function of its scope. The question, then, is whether anything of mere human concern can be of any ultimate concern. “What is a man that he should be clean or one born of woman that he should consider himself just?”

6. Back in verse 6, Eliphaz had said, “Your own mouth condemns you not I, and your own lips have testified against you,” and now it is clear what he meant. For Eliphaz, the surface world, the world to which Job has committed himself, is not merely a superficial world as the other friends had thought, it is an unclean and deeply corrupted world. To take it otherwise as a “ground of discourse” is nothing more than to “fill one’s belly with the east wind.” A twisted view and a crafty tongue may build Job’s arguments, but they can only distract the mind and turn it from realizing its true position.

Does Job think that he pulled himself into being? Does he not realize that his salvation lies in “the compassions of God and His gentle words,” rather than in these “useless words and idle talk that goes nowhere?”

All men are guilty, even His Holy Ones, but Job more than all because of his denial.

6 · Interpretation

7. For reasons which will become clearer in the note to 39:1, the word which had been translated “come writhing into being” in verse 7 is here translated as “writhes in pain.” Eliphaz, of course, intends it as a bitter play on words.

8. “The guilty man writhes in pain all his days and the number of his years lies hidden from the ruthless.” Eliphaz is thinking of what he had said in verse 7. Man’s struggle is not his glory, but his shame. Guilt makes man a stranger to the world and turns his world into a battlefield. Since he has no home, there is nothing for him to defend with dignity. There is, in fact, nothing heroic in that struggle to ennoble it, and it transforms him into a beast.

9. To consider man as the beginning of man with nothing behind him, is to “trust in deceitful nothing.” Any gains achieved purely on the basis of that struggle are open to be lost in that struggle, since no other claim for legitimacy can be made for them.

10. The self-made man in the radical sense can, as such, have no definite goal, and hence no sense of fulfillment.

11. His sense of the struggle as being at the foundation of existence, Eliphaz argues, prevents man from thinking in terms of a goal towards which the struggle is aiming. It, therefore, degenerates into struggle for its own sake.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1 Then Job answered and said: **2** “I have heard so much of this stuff. Bringers of a toilsome compassion, the whole lot of you! **3** Is there no end to such blustery talk? What ails you that you answer me so?!” **4** I too could speak as you do if it were you instead of me! I could heap words upon you and shake my head; **5** strengthen you with my words or hold you in check by the motion of my lips. **6** But when I speak, my pain is not held in check, nor does it subside when I am quiet.²

7 Oh how He has worn me out! You have wiped out my whole community.³ **8** You have shriveled me up as a witness and this distortion has risen up to testify against me.⁴ **9** His malevolent anger tears at me. He gnashes His teeth. My Foe⁵ hones his eyes against me.⁶ **10** They gape at me with their mouths. They strike my cheeks to taunt me. They gather en masse against me. **11** God sets the wicked to close in on me and casts me into the hands of guilty men. **12** I was at ease and He shattered me. He grabbed me by the neck and shattered me. He set me out as a target. **13** His bowmen surrounded me. He cleaved open my kidneys without mercy and spilled my bile out on the ground. **14** He broke me breach after breach. He rushed at me as a conqueror; **15** I have sewed sackcloth over my skin. I have driven my horns into the dust. **16** My face is red with weeping and my eyes are covered with shadowy death, **17** though I have no injustice on my hands and my prayer is pure.

18 Let not the earth cover over my blood or find a place for my outcry. **19** For now my witness must be in heaven, The one who can testify for me must be on high. **20** Oh my advocates,⁷ my friends, my eyes weep before God. **21** Will no one argue for a MAN (*geb_her*) before God as a man (*'adam*) should do for a friend?⁸ **22** For a few years will pass by, and then I shall go the way that I shall not return.

Comments

1. These words are spoken directly to his friends in full awareness of context. His friends were, indeed, to have brought him compassion,

Job 2:11 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, 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.

but the compassion was to have helped him over the sight of toil.

Job 3:10 . . . for it closed not the doors of my mother's belly but hid my eyes from toil.

Job 3:20 Why does He give light to those whom toil has consumed, or life to the bitter of soul?

This is Job's answer to Eliphaz's

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?"

"What ails you that you answer me so?" As it seems, their illness has driven Job mad. His friends, Eliphaz and the others, are part of the surface world. They see the innocent suffer every day, and yet they do not see that they see. Job sees a world that cannot see itself.

For Job, Eliphaz has become a man who cannot allow himself to be human. He raises himself up by bringing all men, including himself down. His contempt for the surface has rendered him insensitive to innocent suffering.

The sight of a man from the surface who has condemned the surface so that it seems to condemn itself, has forced Job to testify against the world for the sake of the world. Job is lost, confused, and angry. He believed in a world that did not believe in itself and that had attacked him for doing so. Job has been broken.

8 · Interpretation

2. This is a wonderful comment on words, what powers they have, and what powers they do not have. They have a power both over the one spoken to and over the speaker himself.

Words have the power to take away pain. Eliphaz knows more than most that what Job says of himself is true:

Job 4:3–4 It was you who always encouraged and strengthened so many frail hands, you who had the words to pick up those that were stumbling and bolster the knees that were about to bend.

but for those who have peered behind the curtain, the magic is gone, and words no longer have their power.

3. Indicative of his madness throughout this chapter is the jagged and abrupt way in which he constantly switches persons from third to second and back to the third, and when he uses the second person, it is not always clear whether he is addressing his friends or God. God, his effects, and the effect that belief in him have, come all of a jumble into Job's mind.

4. His defense would stand him well in any human court or a divine court working under rules intelligible to man. Job knows that, but has been worn out. There is that infinite wheel of suffering that brings feelings of guilt and feelings of guilt that bring suffering. In defending himself against a world of charges, Job feels himself being sucked more and more into the world that makes those charges. Once he is captured by that world, his defense begins to melt.

5. Or "my narrow constraint hones its eyes against me?" See note to Job 6:23.

This ambiguity is key to understanding the kind of madness one sees in Job throughout the remainder of the chapter. Job feels an angry world pressing down upon him, constricting his view till he himself begins to feel small, petty, and guilty of believing that his world could be other.

6. What a telling way of expressing the way in which an angry eye can sharpen itself by its own act of cutting.

7. Some translate "My friends scorn me: my eye pours out tears to God." See note to 33:22.

8. Job's anger is gone now, but not his madness. Rejected now by both earth and heaven, but still convinced of his own innocence, he makes an appeal to both, expecting help from neither. Somewhere God must have the evidence, and man, as a solid friend trusting in both Job and in himself, must find it out.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1 "My spirit has been destroyed and my days snuffed out. The grave is ready for me now. 2 Mocking men are always about me and my eye lives under their discontent.

3. Put up now, go my surety. Who will be the one to take my hand on it?¹ 4 So, You have protected their hearts from insight, and that is why even You no longer have any respect for them.² 5 Why, he would even turn in a friend to get his cut, but the eyes of his children will comprehend.³

6 He has made a folk adage of me, and I've become as Tophet⁴ of Old. 7 My eyes are blind from indignation and all form appears to me but as shadows. 8 The upright are appalled by that. The pure raise up against such impiety. 9 The righteous hold tight to their ways and the man of clean hands adds to his strength.⁵

10 Let them all pass by on in review. No, I find no wise man among you.⁶

11 My days have passed by. My ambitions have been snapped, all that my heart possess. 12 They claim it is day when it is night and in the face of darkness they say that light is near.⁷ 13 If I must take the Pit to be my home, and spread out my couch in darkness; 14 call out to the muck 'Thou art my Father' and call out 'Mother' and 'Sister' to the maggots, 15 where then is my hope? Oh my hopes, who will ever take note of them? 16 They have all sunk down into the Pit and together they lie in the dust."⁸

Comments

1. Chapter 17 is a continuation of the scene which began around verse 18 of the last chapter. Job had asked for a man, one of his friends, to be his advocate. After all, he argued, he and his strange ways of thinking will pass by in "a few years" . . . and will "not return." If nothing remains, then nothing will remain. Their answer, and Job's initial reaction to it, become clear from verses 1 and 2. He is rejected. Then, in verse 3, we are to imagine Job, a smile slowly brightening up his face, going over to each in turn with an outstretched hand.

But in verse 4 it becomes clear that no one had moved a muscle or returned his smile. Then Job must have raised a half-angry, half-knowing eye toward heaven.

2. God, according to Job, has misjudged men. The wisdom that He has passed down to them via the Fathers has so closed them off from the surface that even the wisdom He gave them has become useless.

3. *tak_hlennah*: The Revised Standard, "The eyes of his children will fail": Greenberg, "The eyes of his children will pine away." The root *klh* has as its foundation the notion of "all" or of "a whole." As a verb it can mean either "to be complete" or "to be all," as in the Pennsylvania Dutch expression "Papa is all," i.e., Papa is dead. We have taken it in the former sense, they in the latter, but either interpretation is reasonable.

4. The text is quite unclear at this point, but if the translation is correct, the reference is to one of the valleys below the walls of Jerusalem.

10 • Interpretation

Jer. 7:31–32 And they have built the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere.

2Kings 23:10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech.

and it did, indeed become a kind of byword:

Isa. 19:12–13 Thus will I do to this place, says the Lord, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah—all the houses upon whose roofs incense has been burned to all the host of heaven, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods—shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.

5. Job must have been thinking: “The others, Eliphaz and Zophar and the rest of mankind, they all live in what seems to them to be a single world. It has its ways and its forms. They share an outward cast of sanity which they maintain by holding to it tightly; but for me, poor man, the molds are cracked and when outward form begins to melt inner sanity cannot hold.”

6. Job, in a crazed vision, sees himself as a general, with the whole world marching past him on review in uniform.

7. This is how they do it. Their molds are never cracked because the surface undergoes a constant transmutation and deformation till it fits the mold exactly. Night is called day. Innocent is called guilty, and pains which should be faced are eternally called temporary.

8. As in Gresham’s Law, false hopes drive out the true. We do not know yet exactly what Job’s hopes for himself and perhaps for the whole of mankind were. We only know that they are incompatible with the notion that man is a maggot. The best one can do for now is to say that the notion of man as a maggot seems to be equivalent to the total denial of the ultimate relevance of the surface as it appears to man.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1 Then Bildad answered and said: 2 “How long will you continue to set these traps in speech? Try to understand and then we will speak. 3 Why are we considered beasts and made unclean in your eyes? 4 You, you who tear yourself

apart in anger, Is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? or the rock dislodged from its place?¹

5 The light of the wicked will be smothered and there will be no glow around his fire. 6 Light will turn dark in his tent. His candle will fail him. 7 The stride of his perversion will be hobbled. His plans will trip him up, 8 for his own feet will lead him into a net, and he will walk himself right into the trap. 9 A snare will grab him by the heel, a web tighten about him. 10 His appointed rope lies hidden in the ground, a snare on his path. 11 Terror falls upon him from everywhere sending his feet at odds. 12 His vigor will know starvation: disaster is headed straight for his ribs. 13 His skin will be eaten away; death's first born will consume his members. 14 He will be torn from his tent of safety and marched off to the King of Terror. 15 It takes up lodging in his tent uninvited. Brimstone is scattered over his hut. 16 His roots will be dried up from beneath, and his branches parched from above. 17 All recollection of him will be lost from the land and he will have no name abroad. 18 He will be thrust from light into darkness and driven from this fruitful orb. 19 For him there will be no heir or scion, not a shred left in all his haunts. 20 They of the west are horrified by his days, and they of the east are seized by confusion. 21 These are indeed the dwellings of the unjust for this is the place that knew not God."²

Comments

1. We remember that it was Bildad who showed a certain kind of genuine compassion for the tender reed which he ultimately had to condemn (cf. 8:11ff.). Here again we see the same patience and understanding in his dealings with Job. These four verses should be sufficient to assure us that Bildad, at least, is neither a beast nor unclean. We must take his implicit advice to Job with great seriousness.

Let us suppose that there is something to what Job is saying. Is it worth all the anger? Can he achieve anything beyond tearing himself apart? What does Bildad mean when he says "Is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? or the rock dislodged from its place?" There are so many things he could have meant.

Did he mean, "Job, you are too quick and have not sufficiently considered the thing you are asking for. If God were suddenly to change the whole world to make it conform exactly to your admittedly just deserts, how many others would have to suffer unreservedly because of that change?"

Or he may have had in mind the time back in 14:18 when Job had said, "A mountain has fallen and crumbled away, a rock dislodged from its place." That was the moment when Job woke from his false dream and suddenly confronted the surface again as if for the first time. Perhaps Bildad is saying that wisdom does not come in a flash. A sudden confrontation with the surface could itself turn out to be as deceptive as any old wives' tale. Horrors loom out in dispro-

portion; goods may be taken for granted and overlooked. Time, generations of time, may indeed be required for a tradition to pull our perceptions back to reality.

Or his question, “Is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? or the rock dislodged from its place?” may have been a response to Job’s last thoughts. If so, what are we to think of all his hopes? Suppose that he and all men were free to work toward them on their own. Could they really pull it off? Would things really be better? In the remainder of his speech, Bildad will go on to articulate his reasons for believing that it is not likely.

2. It is critical for our understanding of the argument to note that the word “God” does not occur in Bildad’s speech until the very end. It is, in fact, the final word of the last verse, and therein lies the whole of its rhetorical value; but even there, God does not appear as an actor.

Instead, we have lines like “The light of the wicked will be smothered and there will be no glow around his fire” in which no direct cause is given; or even more indicative of the tenor of the passage as a whole are lines like “The stride of his perversion will be hobbled. His plans will trip him up for his own feet will lead him into a net, and he will walk right into the trap.” Isn’t it more likely that Job’s high hopes for man will translate themselves into such “plans” as these that will naturally lead them to their own destruction, given man as he is in “a place that knows not God?”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1 Then Job answered and said: **2** “How long will you torment my spirit and crush me with words? **3** How many times you have humiliated me! Do you feel no shame to be so harsh towards me? **4** Even if I have erred,¹ that error must lodge within me, **5** but, if you must place yourselves above me to prove my disgrace, **6** know that it is God Himself who has perverted me.²

7 He has encircled me with His net. I scream ‘Violence’ but I get no answer. I cry out, but there is no place of judgment. **8** He has barred the road and I cannot pass through.³ He has covered my path with darkness, **9** stripped all glory from me, and removed the crown from my head.⁴

10 He tears at me from all sides round and so I retreat. He uproots my hopes like a tree. **11** His anger burns against me, and He accounts me as one of his foes. **12** Together, His troops advance. They erect a highway toward me and encamp round about my tent.

13 He made my brothers withdraw from me, and of my friends He has made strangers. **14** Those who were close to me have left; and those who knew me have all forgotten. **15** Those who lived in my house and the women who served me account me an alien and to them I have become no more than a stranger. **16** I called to my servant,⁵ but he gave no answer, and now must I curry to him for

favor. **17** My breath is repulsive to my wife, and to the sons of my own belly I am loathsome. **18** Even children have contempt for me. When I rise, they speak against me. **19** All those who were closest to me abhor me and those I loved have turned against me. **20** My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh. Only the skin of my teeth⁶ ceases to hold.⁷

21 Be gentle with me, you, my friends, be gentle, for the hand of God has struck me. **22** Why do you pursue me like God, taking satisfaction out of my flesh?

23 Who will find a place that my words may be written down? Who will see to it that they are inscribed in the Book?⁸ **24** With stylus of iron and with lead incised in The Rock forever?⁹ **25** Yet I know that my vindicator¹⁰ lives and that one day he will stand up upon the dust.

26 Even after my skin has been stripped away, yet from out of my raw flesh shall I behold God.¹¹ **27** It is I myself who shall see. My own eyes must behold, and not those of a stranger,¹² although the vitals within my bosom are finished. **8** You have said ‘How are we persecuting him?’ The root of the matter, they say, lies within me. **29** But, stand in terror of the sword, for fury is a perversion meet for the sword, that you may know that there is judgment.”¹³

Comments

1. The word used implies a wrong done inadvertently.

2. In the last chapter, Bildad had said, “The stride of his perversion will be hobbled”: and later in this chapter, Job will admit that “indignation is a perversion meet for the sword.” Job is angry because he knows that Bildad is right, and he knows that Bildad is right because he knows of that anger. Behind Bildad is the sober notion that angry men cannot be free men. For Job, however, men who are not free cannot help being angry. By perverting error into perversion God has perverted man.

3. The anger that arises out of finding oneself living in two worlds is closely related to the problem of freedom. Roads that are open and beckon in the one are closed and forbidden in the other. There is only enough room for a scream. Motion that cannot move turns into anger. Each world has its rightful claim, and yet there is no neutral ground for judgment.

4. “He has covered my path with darkness, stripped all glory from me, and removed the crown from my head.” To Job, he, and perhaps all men, almost seem to have been born into a bright and glorious path, with a crown on his head, all of which have been stripped from him. Man was born into a single world, a bright and open surface in which the paths were open and action was possible in spite of all the random harshness of disease and famine.

Now we can begin to get a somewhat clearer picture of what Job meant in his first speech when he said, “May the day of my birth rest in oblivion, and

14 · *Interpretation*

with it . . . but let darkness and gloom salvage it . . . for it closed not the gates of my mother's womb but hid my eyes from toil."

It was not an ugly day. Job had cursed it because, in its beauties, it gave rise to all those hopes which were soon to be dashed.

5. or "slave"

6. Others: "I have escaped by the skin of my teeth." Literally they are correct, but I am not sure that the Hebrew words mean what the English expression has come to mean since the days of King James. I believe he means that while most of his skin, which should fit loosely and comfortably, has become hard and tight, his gums, which should fit tight, have lost their grip, and his teeth are beginning to fall out.

7. Job is now more estranged from the outside than at any other point in the poem. He is left within himself. Disease has drawn closer, and those whom he loved have gone farther away. Even the breath that escapes the self has become other, and makes others of others.

The distinction between self and other has all but replaced the distinction between the surface and the wisdom of the ages. The world of the surface which no longer believes in itself, no longer believes in Job, partly because he is a part of that surface, but mainly because he was the one who believed in it. The harshness of the surface, the disease, has pushed the surface farther from him, and his own skin pulls tighter round him.

8. As one reads this verse, it is hard not to be aware of the fact that there was at least one man who did in fact provide that place. The Book of Job lies open before us.

9. Job sees his words as something to be set down for all time, although he can have no assurance that they will ever be read. It is implied, however, that whatever Job has seen will always be there to be seen. It is further implied that if anyone should ever see what Job has seen after having read the book, nevertheless, he will not experience what Job experienced. The mere awareness that there once was another who was not "other" will change all that radically. For him there will be no place for anger.

10. The word is from the same root as the word translated "redeem" in 3:5.

Job's statement "I know that my vindicator lives" appears to come in answer to his question, "Who will find a place that my words may be written down? Who will see to it that they are inscribed in the Book. With stylus of iron and with lead incised in the Rock forever?"

Job sees as his vindicator the one who will come along one day and understand deeply enough to write down his tale for others to read.

11. We must examine more closely the role that "skin" has been playing and will continue to play throughout the book as a whole. Whether it has anything to do with the boils or not we do not know, but it is clear that the seat of the disease is his skin:

- Job 7:5 My skin has become hard and begins to ooze.
Job 19:20 My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh. Only the skin of my teeth ceases to hold.
Job 19:26 Even after my skin has been stripped away, yet from out of my raw flesh shall I behold God.
Job 30:30 My skin turned black and is now peeling off me; my bones are scorched by the heat.

In his dream of the past it was one of the things for which he remembered God most fondly.

- Job 10:11 With skin and flesh You clothed me and knit me together with bones and sinews.

It was also Bildad's prime example.

- Job 18:13 His skin will be eaten away; death's first born will consume his members.

We have yet to meet the Leviathan, but as we can see, he has skin impenetrable by man.

- Job 41:31 Can you fill his hide (skin) with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears?

Skin is that thin film of protection between self and other. When it is gone, even the most gentle and pleasant breeze can become a source of pain, and for Job at this point, every other is other. In opening himself up to the surface world, Job exposed himself, and left himself even more naked than when he "came out of his mother's belly" and showed that courage which he had accused Zophar of lacking.

The Satan had said "skin beneath skin!" According to him, Job had a thick skin of self-interest under his skin of openness. If Job does live up to this verse, the Satan will have lost his bet because Job will have proved that he has no skin behind his skin.

12. For the first time in the book we see an importance that "seeing" and especially "seeing for himself" is beginning to have for Job. For the moment, at least, he has started to feel that all of the anger and confusion might stem from the fact that he has seen the surface with his own eyes, whereas he has only heard the world of wisdom with the hearing of his ears.

13. It surely looks quite impossible to say what this verse could mean coming from the mouth of Job at this time. Many people think that the verse has either been transposed from somewhere else in the poem, or has been terribly

16 · Interpretation

garbled. All this and more are possible. The present commentator would not claim that his arguments are so cogent as to have demonstrated the integrity of the text. Anyone who believes that he has the Book of Job, translation or text, short of divine help is sadly mistaken.

In despair, I thought it best to follow the received text as assiduously as I could in hopes of traveling vaguely in the direction intended by the author rather than to second guess the text with a false sense of security.

CHAPTER TWENTY

1 Then Zophar the Naamatite answered and said, **2** "It is my disquietude that would have me answer; all for a feeling that lies within me, **3** for I seem to hear the admonition of my own shame; a spirit out of my own understanding would have me reply.¹

4 Do you know this, that from timeless time, since man ('*adam*) was set upon the earth, **5** the joy of the guilty has been quick, and the delight of the defiled but of a moment.² **6** Though his loftiness rise to the heavens, his head reaching to the clouds, **7** like his own dung he will be lost in eternity. Even those who see him will ask 'Where is he?' **8** He flies off as a dream and no one can find him. He recedes like a vision of the night. **9** The eyes that observed him have given o'er; they no even longer take note of him in his place.³

10 His sons find favor with the poor and their hands return his wealth.⁴ **11** His bones are full of vigor, yet they lie with him in the dust. **12** Though evil bring sweetness to his lips and he hide it under his tongue, **13** cherish it, never abandon it, but retain it on his palate, **14** the bread in his bowels will become the gall of an asp within him. **15** He devours wealth only to vomit it back, for God has seized it from out of his belly. **16** He will suck the poison of asps and the tongue of a viper will slay him.⁵

17 He shall not see the streams, the rivers, or brooks of honey and butter.⁶ **18** The fruit of his labors he shall return and never consume. Oh, he will receive the full compensation of his labors but it will bring no joy. **19** He may steal a house, but he cannot cause it to flourish for he has crushed and abandoned the poor. **20** Since he knew no peace from his belly, nothing dear to him shall escape; **21** there will be no survivor to enjoy it and thus nothing of his merit shall endure. **22** Though all his needs are fulfilled he will feel hard pressed.⁷ The hand of toil will be upon him. **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. **24** He will flee the machine of iron only to be overturned by a bow made of brass. **25** Drawn, and through his body it goes, lightning swift into the gall, and terror strikes him.⁸ **26** The whole of darkness has been stored up to be his treasures. He will be consumed⁹ by an unblown fire and all shall go ill with the remnant left in his tent. **27** The heavens will unveil his perversion,¹⁰ and the

earth shall rise up against him. **28** The harvest of his lands¹¹ will be unveiled, trickled away on the day of His wrath. **29** Such is the portion of the wicked man (*adam*); an inheritance left him by the word God.”¹²

Comments

1. Zophar makes no attempt to refute Job or even to disagree or blame him. Instead, he gently suggests an alternative to “seeing for oneself” which he has found within himself. It’s more like “hearing” than it is like “seeing.” Yet it is not the hearing the others spoke of—hearing the wisdom of the fathers. One might call it a kind of “hearing for oneself.”

It does not arise from the surface of an external world, but comes from a deeply internal sense of shame that breaks down the distinction between admonition and understanding. This new understanding reshapes and gives meaning to the surface.

2. The superficial world does not bring along with it an understanding of itself. Although it takes place in time, it can reveal neither its own past or its own future. As we remember from Zophar’s first speech, the daily events which take place on the simple plane of the surface world are, in fact, so complicated that their interconnections are well beyond the realm of human ken.

Only by searching out a deeper understanding of wickedness and of joy in themselves, do we come to realize that they cannot live together for long.

3. Chances are good that no lightning bolt will strike at him from out of heaven. He continues to breathe and to take up space, but, great as he may be, he ceases to be part of any man’s world. They no longer treat him or recognize him as a human being. As he loses connection with others, he loses all sense of connection with himself. Even a surface world, in order to exist, must be recognized as such.

4. If whatever he has done is inevitably to be undone by his own, he must live knowing that all will be as if he had not been.

5. “His bones are full of vigor yet they lie with him in the dust . . . the bread in his bowels will become the gall of an asp within him.” The world must be a world for someone. For bread to be bread, it must be digested well. The world is not merely a given, it must also be a received. To be, it must be received by a soul capable of receiving it. Job’s allegedly surface world has been ill-digested and has turned into the gall of an asp.

6. Zophar, of course, means that he will look right past them without ever noticing them or their beauty. The “world of listening” says that what Job or any man can “see for himself, with his own eyes”—this surface world—radically depends upon that self and upon those eyes. “The streams, the rivers, and brooks of honey and butter” have all faded out of his vision so that he scarcely

sees them and will never remember them. In short, they are as little a part of his world as he is a part of the world of other men.

Zophar's speech reveals and even exemplifies itself. The words of verses 16 and 18 could have been said by someone in anger, but no one while in anger would have noticed the things he points out in verse 17.

7. This seems to be the foundation of justice for Zophar. Job may be right in what he says of his surface world, but no one actually lives in such a world. We all live in our graspings of, and our reactions to that world. His inner voice tells him that the inner voices of others—greedy, angry voices—will not allow them to see, or to hear, or to enjoy the world around them.

8. A world without joy and everything in it wears a mask of terror. Job does not listen for beauty; his world is full of horrors, because he is full of anger.

9. "eaten"

10. In a way, Job is right. Perversion is not the sort of thing which reveals itself in a surface world. We cannot see it or feel its effects upon us. If the heavens do not lay it bare for Job, the rising of the earth will appear as uncaused as an unblown fire. Job's anger has its roots in his view of the world.

11. "house"

12. Loneliness and fear will ultimately drive him to such actions that even on the surface "The heavens will lay bare his perversion, and the earth shall rise up against him."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1 Then Job answered and said: 2 "Listen well to my words, and let that be your compassion.¹ 3 Bear with me while I speak, and after I have spoken, then you may mock. 4 Is my complaint against man (*adam*)? If it were, why has my spirit not worn itself out?² 5 Turn to me and be appalled. Clap your hand to your mouth. 6 When I remember, I am filled with terror and a palsy grips my flesh.

7 Why do the wicked live on, ancient, yet heroic in power, their seed firmly established by their side,³ 8 their progeny spread out before their eyes? 9 Their homes are at peace, without fear, for the stave of God is not upon them. 10 Their bull breeds and is not rejected. His cow drops her calf with never a miscarry. 11 They set their babes free as sheep; their children dance. 12 They strike⁴ up with tumbrel and with lute and rejoice to the strains of a pipe.⁵

13 They spend their days in good cheer and in peace they descend into the Pit.

14 They say to God: 'Turn away from us. We have no desire to know your ways.' 15 'What is this Almighty that we should serve him? How shall we profit if we do come to terms with Him?' 16 Is not good fortune in the palm of their hand?⁶ Though such counsel of the wicked is beyond me, 17 how often is

it that the lamp of the wicked is put out, or that calamities come upon them, or how often does He allot them pain in His anger? **18** Are they as straw before the wind, or as chaff that the storm has made off with?⁷

19 God, you say, will treasure up all his wickedness to lay upon his sons? Why then, let Him complete the bargain now and then shall he learn. **20** Let his eyes see his own ruin and let him drink of the Almighty's cruet of fury:⁸ **21** for what does he care for his house after he has gone, and the number of his months has been cut off.⁹

22 Would he teach understanding even to that God who can judge those who are on high?

23 One dies in the (height of) his simplicity wholly at ease and secure. **24** His skin is sleek; the marrow of his bones still moist. **25** Another dies in the bitterness of his soul, never having eaten of goodness, **26** yet together they lie in the dust, and the worms cover them over.

27 Oh, I know what you are thinking, the machination you have devised against me. **28** For you say, 'Where is the house of this prince? where is this tent, this dwelling place of the evil ones?' **29** You have inquired of every passer by, but no sign have you ever recognized **30** because the wicked man is spared on the day of calamity, rescued from the frenzy. **31** Who can make him face his ways? Well, his deeds are done now, who will repay him? **32** When he is brought to the grave, they will set a vigil over his tomb. **33** The clods of the wadi will fall sweetly upon him. Everyone¹⁰ will march along after him, and those who precede him will be without number.¹¹

34 How, then can you offer me such empty compassion when your answers remain full of treachery?"

Comments

1. Job begins by appealing to Zophar's sense of hearing.

2. For Job, Zophar is right. A man cannot live on hatred for his fellow man. His spirit would wear itself out. But Job can see beauty in man and in the world. We know that; he saw it on the day he was born. His complaint is against all that beauty which obscures all that is unpleasant by contorting the surface to make it fit a plan rather than allowing man to meet that world as it is, standing on his own two feet.

In Job's mind, the true misanthropist is not the one who is angry with man for believing himself to be a maggot; the true misanthropist is the one who loves man although he believes that man is in fact a maggot.

3. The wicked do not disappear or fade from the minds of men. On the contrary, they become the main subject of the historian and are glorified by the poets. Start with Romulus and go on from there. When the founders of great nations commit horrible crimes, it is the deed and not the man that is forgotten.

20 • Interpretation

4. “raise”

5. “Why do the wicked live on. . . ?” For Job, Zophar’s remarks, perceptive as they are, have not fully faced the question because he has not fully faced the world. The depth of his understanding of a part has obscured the whole. To that extent, he has contorted the surface in order to allow himself to look at it.

6. Greenberg translates: “Their happiness is not their own doing.” In the Book of Job it is often difficult to distinguish a negative statement from a negatively worded rhetorical question which, as in English, implies a strongly worded positive answer. For example, “Is that not so?” strongly implies that it is so. But the author of the Book of Job often leaves it up to the reader to distinguish between “Is that not so?” and “That is not so!” It is a very common problem throughout the whole of the book, and each translator must deal with it as best as he can. The Revised Standard and King James have about the same as I do.

7. What was said in the last note also applies to verses 16–19, and translations differ greatly.

8. I have taken *umeh^amat* as a kind of play on words. Fundamentally it means “from anger,” but together with the word “drink” one cannot help also hearing the word *umehemet* “and from a flask.”

9. Verses 19 through 21, the culmination of the first part of Job’s speech, are intended to be Job’s answer to what Zophar had said to him in his last speech.

Job 20:26 The whole of darkness has been stored up to be his treasures. He will be consumed by an unblown fire and all shall go ill with the remnant left in his tent. The heavens will lay bare his perversion, and the earth shall rise up against him.

Zophar’s notion that divine justice works in unseen ways and by unblown fires is both unwise and unjust. If punishment is not related to the crime, it will not seem to be related to the crime, and then no matter how much our demands for justice may have been met, the one who is punished will have learned nothing. This roundabout justice is also unjust because too many innocent people get hurt along the way. It may be enough for him to see his offspring “strike up with tumbrel and with lute and rejoice to the strains of a pipe” when they were children and under his care, but when in later life they are left to pick up the pieces, he may neither know nor care.

10. all man (*‘adam*)

11. Oh, I know what you are thinking, the machination you have devised against me. For you say “Where is the house of this prince? . . . and those who precede him will be without number.”

This, clearly is not an easy passage to understand. So far as I can understand, Job is thinking of a case in which everyone knows that somewhere in the past

something horrible happened; but in order to live with the surface, they have so transformed the past that no one remembers who, or what, or when, and all has returned to peace and tranquility.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: **2** “Can a man (*geb_her*) be of any use to his God as a prudent man can be of use to a friend? **3** When you act justly does it give the Almighty any kind of pleasure? Does He profit when your ways become simple? **4** Do you really think that it is because of your FEAR that He has rebuked you and hauled you up for judgment? **5** Oh, you are evil. Are there no bounds to your perversions? **6** You have impounded you brothers on a whim, and whatever clothed the naked you’ve stripped away. **7** You’ve given no water for the weary to drink, and bread you have withheld from the hungry. **8** And so the land goes to the man of arms. The favored’ occupy it, **9** but the widow you have sent away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been crushed. **10** And for that you have been surrounded by snares, fear strikes you of a sudden, **11** or darkness so that you cannot see, and a flood of waters has covered you over.²

12 Is not God high in the heavens? Only look to the utmost star. See how far off it is. **13** And so you say: ‘How much can God know? Can He judge from behind that thick mist?’ **14** ‘Clouds obscure Him and He can see nothing as He strolls round the circuit of heaven.’ **15** Have you kept to that primordial path which the men of wickedness have trod, **16** men who were snatched up before their time?³ Their foundation flows off in a stream. **17** Those who say to God ‘Leave us be!’ How can the Almighty do any thing about it **18** when it was He who filled their houses with all kinds of good?⁴ Though the counsel of the guilty is beyond me, **19** the righteous see it and rejoice; the innocent show derision, **20** saying ‘Has not our enemy been destroyed, their remains consumed by fire?’⁵

21 Please, come close to⁶ Him and be at peace. All good things will come your way. **22** Receive guidance from His mouth and keep His saying in your heart. **23** If you will return to the Almighty and be rebuilt, if you keep injustice far from your tent, **24** take gold dust as sand and nuggets as rocks in a stream, **25** The Almighty will be your gold and most precious silver, **26** for then you shall take delight in the Almighty and raise your countenance up unto God. **27** If you supplicate to Him, He will hear you, and you will have fulfilled your vows. **28** Proclaim your words and thus it shall be. A light will shine upon your path. **29** When men have sunk low you will say ‘(it is their) audacity’! But He will save the humbled. **30** Even the guilty He will deliver; they will be delivered through the purity of your hands.”⁷

22 · Interpretation

Comments

1. “those of raised countenance”

2. One reads Eliphaz’s speech without knowing quite what to say. From what we know, or seem to know of Job’s character, this sudden torrent of accusations appears to be quite undeserved. We have God’s word for it in Chapter 1, and in Chapter 29, Job says:

. . . . for an ear had heard and it blessed me; an eye had seen and it approved, because I had saved a poor man when he cried out, and an orphan when there was no one else to help him. The blessings of those who had been lost came to me, and I made the widow’s heart sing. I put on judgment, and it covered me. A just cause fit like a coat or a hat. I became eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and often I would search out a case for a man whom I did not even know. I would break the jaw of the unjust and wrest the prey from his teeth.

It hardly seems as if we are speaking of the same man. Perhaps one should discount God’s speech as belonging to a very different strain of the story. Or perhaps Job was lying or had never really opened his eyes to the surface world around him. We have no way of knowing. We can only say that if it is the case, Job deserved everything that happened, and the whole book is nothing but a tempest in a teapot.

Another possibility is that Eliphaz was frightened by what Job said. The thought of seeing a just man suffer may have so threatened to pull his world apart that he called the just man unjust and was at ease.

Or perhaps Eliphaz was right in a way in which Job could not have understood. Let us suppose that Job climbed a hundred hills, and that in each valley he clothed a hundred naked men. The surface world is a finite world, and there is always another hill, a hill not climbed: and each finite act in that finite world has an infinite number of effects in the infinite world. Justice, for Eliphaz, may require what no human can perform.

3. What Job proposes, this surface world, is not new. It would, in fact come to nothing more than a return to pagan times when the sun was thought to be a god and the bringer of all warmth and sustenance, but no relationship was seen or felt then between the divine and morality. Human life was short and unstable.

4. Eliphaz seems to be trying to needle Job into seeing that the finitude of his surface world implies that there can be no universal standard justice beyond itself. The only thing in the visible world above man is the sun, which, as far as concerns itself, shines on good and bad alike.

5. When things go badly for them, however, the righteous know that there are other causes.

6. This is a play on words. It is the same word that was translated “of use to” in verse one. A man cannot “be of use to God,” but he can “come close” to God.

7. These are Eliphaz’s last words. With them he pleads with Job to give up his claim to the critical significance of the surface. It is a world in which each thing is what it is. Gold dust is gold dust, nuggets are nuggets, and the guilty are guilty. But if a man is “rebuilt” then he may “proclaim his words and thus it shall be.”

Job’s position either presupposes or soon leads to the notion of nature or natures. If argument is to be in place, things must be what they are. There must be an intelligible necessity to the world. All that is involved in holding to the surface. But that would limit prayer.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

1 Then Job answered and said: 2 “My musings are bitter again today. My hand is heavy from all my groaning.¹ 3 Who can tell me how to find Him! How I might come to his appointed place! 4 I would lay out my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. 5 I would know with what words He would answer me! I want to understand what He would have to say to me. 6 Would He strive against me with His great power? No, surely He would place His confidence in me. 7 There an upright man can reason with Him, and there would I be released from my judge forever.²

8 I got me to the east, but it was full of His absence³; to the west, but I could not sense Him; 9 to the north among His works, but I could not grasp Him. In the south He was veiled and I could not see. 10 But He knows the way I have taken. He has tried me and I have come through as gold. 11 My foot held tight to His track; I kept to His ways and did not swerve. 12 Nor have I departed from the commandments of His lips. From within my breast I have treasured up the words of His mouth.⁴ 13 But He is of but one purpose, who can dissuade Him? His soul need only desire, and it is done. 14 But yet He fills my breast, and there are many such who stand by Him. 15 It is because of all this that His presence leads me into confusion.⁵ When I reflect I fear Him. 16 God has softened my heart,⁶ The Almighty has led me into confusion. 17 I was not destroyed by the darkness only because He had concealed⁷ its thick murk from me.”

Comments

1. It is the morning of the next day. Job may have thought that after a good night’s sleep his world might look different, that confusion and frustration

24 · Interpretation

might just vanish like some bad dream. But the problems did not just go away; “My musings are bitter again today.” They were real and he was bitter.

2. “No,” thought Job, “Things can’t be as Eliphaz says. If things are in no way what they are, then the just is not just and all becomes meaningless. If this slender bit of the surface before me has no place within God’s whole, how could it stand before me?”

3. “but it was full of His absence.” Simply *ainnenu* but see note to 7:8.

4. Job’s spirit was not innately that of a rebel. He had accepted the world he had grown up in, and loved it. It filled his breast and the human horizon, as it was defined by “the words of His mouth” he held as a treasure. Still there was a kind of emptiness. He looked around him for the source of those things that he treasured most, but all was veiled. He believed only that the one he could not see could see him.

5. God’s law in speech, and God’s law in action: To Job, the one filled his breast and seemed the only thing of value in the world; the other was a nest of meaningless chaos. Such was the presence that led Job into confusion.

6. To see what Job means and the irony implied in his words, one must consider the duality of having a “soft heart”:

2Chr 34:27 because your heart was SOFT and you humbled yourself before
God when you heard his words against this place and its inhabitants,
and you have humbled yourself before me, and have rent your clothes
and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD.

Deu 20:3 and shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, you draw near this day to
battle against your enemies: let not your heart BE SOFT; do not fear,
or tremble, or be in dread of them;

It was God’s talk of justice that first softened Job’s heart and laid it bare to be buffeted by His actions. The “soft heart” which came to be out of a love of justice is another way of speaking about Job’s lack of an “underskin.” It was this openness that left him open to so much pain.

7. “covered over”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

1 “Why has not the Almighty established¹ specific times for judgment? Now, even those who know Him cannot recognize His timing.² 2 Boundary stones³ are carried off, flocks seized and peacefully sent to pasture. 3 Men lead away the donkeys of the fatherless. They have impounded the widow’s ox. 4a The destitute they turned from the roads. 9 They pluck the fatherless from the breast and take a pledge of the poor.⁴ 4b The poor of the land hide themselves together. 5 They are wild asses in the desert, going off about their labors of

snatching up at dawn. They have only the wasteland to provide food for the young men. **6** They harvest in the fields and glean the vineyards of the guilty.

7 Naked, they pass the night without clothing, and shelter from the cold there is none. **8** Drenched by torrents in the hills, they cling to a rock for want of shelter.⁵ **10** Without clothing, they go about naked.⁶ Hungry, they bear the sheaves; **11** confined within walls, they labor at the olive press; trampling down in the wine vats, they thirst. **12** From out of the city come mortal groans; wounded souls cry out; yet in all that God sees nothing unsavory.⁷ **13** They⁸ were rebels against the light who could neither recognize its path nor remain within its course. **14** In the light, a murderer arises killing the poor and the needy, and at night he turns thief. **15** An adulterous eye watches at twilight, saying, 'No eye will take note of me' and he conceals his face. **16** In the dark he tunnels his way into houses which are sealed up tight against him by day, since he⁹ does not know the light. **17** For him morning and the Shadow of Death are all the same for he recognizes nothing but the terrors of the Shadow of Death.

18 He¹⁰ is held in discredit over the entire face of the waters and his lot is accursed upon the land. He cannot turn down the path to the vineyards. **19** As drought and heat steal water from snow, so does the Pit to those who sin. **20** The womb will forget him and the worms will find him sweet. Let him no longer be remembered, that injustice may be broken as a tree. **21** He is mated to a barren woman who cannot give birth, and life shall not go well for his widow.

22 By his might, he can make the valiant bend, and though he may stand tall for a time he has no steadfast belief in life. **23** His world may seem secure, and he may come to rely upon it, but his eyes are upon its ways.¹¹ **24** He may be exalted for a while, but then he is gone; brought low, and shriveled up like a mallow, withered away like heads of grain. **25** If it be not so then prove me a liar, and make my words worth nothing.”

Comments

1. The word I have translated here as “established” is a rather complicated word which we have considered before but not in much depth. The full range of its meaning can only be seen by looking at how it is used:

Job 10:13 But You *treasured* all these things up in Your heart.

Job 14:13 Who can move You to hide me in the Pit and conceal me till your anger passes?

Job 15:20 The guilty man writhes in pain all his days and the number of his years lies hidden from those who can terrorize.

Job 17:04 So, You have *protected* their hearts from insight, and that is why even You no longer have any respect for them.

26 · Interpretation

- Job 20:26 The whole of darkness has been stored up to be his *treasures*.
Job 21:19 God, you say, will *treasure* up all his wickedness to lay upon his sons? Why then, let Him complete the bargain now and then shall he learn.
Job 23:12 From within my breast I have *treasured* up the words of His mouth.
Job 24:01 Why has not the Almighty *established* specific times for judgment?

2. Literally, “His days”

Punishments that do not clearly appear as punishments, rewards that do not clearly appear as rewards; such things do no good, and it is the innocent who suffer.

3. The collapse of civilization, according to Job, begins with the destruction the most tangible sign of that act which first brought it into being. See note to verse 10.

4. This is in fact 24:9 which I, along with others, have placed after 24:4a.

5. 24:9 transposed to follow 24:4a.

6.

The poor of the land hide themselves together. They are wild asses in the desert, going off about their labors of snatching up at dawn. They have only the wasteland to provide food for the young men. . . . Naked, they pass the night without clothing, and shelter from the cold there is none. Drenched by torrents in the hills, they cling to a rock for want of shelter. Without clothing, they go about naked.

The picture that Job paints here is of a world reverted back to primitive, almost animal-like days. The times that Eliphaz had warned of are already around us, but they were none of Job’s doing. The true cause is God’s justice, which lacks the kind of order and timing that man can grasp.

Why has not the Almighty established specific times for judgment? Now, even those who know Him cannot recognize His timing. Boundary-stones are carried off, flocks seized and peacefully sent to pasture.

The all-too-often-praised unintelligibility of the divine order and justice leave men no imitative models, models without which all law is quick to disappear.

7. Whatever remains of civilization only serves to increase the sense of degradation.

8. It is not immediately clear to whom the word “They” refers, but by his use of the emphatic pronoun, I take it that the author has not switched subjects but is still speaking of the poor. If this is the correct interpretation, Job is not talking about Sin at this point, but of that kind of depravity that can only arise out of the total hopelessness described in verses 7 through 12. For further discussion, see the note to verse 18.

9. The Hebrew text switches to the plural for the rest of the passage.

10. The translations vary greatly from this point on till the end of the chapter. Some translate it in the indicative while others put the whole passage in the

hortatory; “May he be held in discredit . . . and may his lot be accursed . . . May he not turn down the path . . .”

The essential problem is that, taken in the indicative, the passage would seem to be in direct contradiction to everything Job has been saying so far. Some even solve the problem by attributing the speech to one of the other speakers. None of these solutions is absurd or impossible.

If we take him to still be speaking about those of the poor who were sucked into degradation and then into crime, however, the passage begins to make a bit more sense. Job would then be saying that those are the ones who are in fact more likely to suffer ill effects from their actions.

This interpretation should not be overlooked, though it is far from certain. The main argument in its favor is that verse 25 does not sit very well with the hortatory interpretation, while the rest of the passage, if taken to refer to all wrongdoers, does not sit well with the book as a whole.

11. Greenberg translates: “Though he have the strength to seize bulls May he live with no assurance of survival. Yet [God] gives him the security on which he relies, and keeps watch over his affairs.”

The Revised Standard translates: “Yet [God] prolongs (pull/bend) [the life of] the mighty by his power; they rise up when they despair of life. [He] gives them security and they are supported; and his eyes are upon their ways.”

I have: “By his might, he can make the valiant bend, and though he may stand tall [for a time] he has no steadfast belief in life. His world may seem secure, [it/He gives him to security] and he may [come to] rely upon it, but his eyes are upon its ways.”

I have brackets around words that do not actually appear in the Hebrew text to facilitate comparison.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:¹ **2** Dominion and fear are His. He makes peace in His high place. **3** Is there any number to His troops? Upon whom does His light not fall? **4** How can a mortal think himself just before God or what can cleanse anyone born of woman? **5** Look high as the moon, nothing shines. Even the stars are not pure in His sight. **6** And now what of these mortals, the maggots or the son of man (*‘adam*),² the worm.³

Comments

1. In order to understand this, the shortest chapter of the book and less than half its nearest rival, we must begin by looking at the plan of the central section of the book, including Chapters 3 through 25 as a whole.

Chapter	Number of Verses			
	Job	Eliphaz	Bildad	Zophar
3	26			
4–5		48		
6–7	51			
8			22	
9–10	56			
11				20
12–14	75			
15		35		
16–17	38			
18			21	
19	29			
20				29
21	34			
22		30		
23–24	42			
25			6	

As we can see, the original plan called for three rounds of three sets of two speeches each. We can also see that the dialogue was cut off in the middle of Bildad's last speech and that Zophar's final speech was never given. We are not told whether Bildad simply stopped talking, or whether Job cut him off.

2. Bildad ends with the words "And now what of these mortals, the maggots or the son of man, the worm." We remember them well. Back in Chapter 17, Job had said, "If I must . . . call out 'Mother' and 'Sister' to the maggots, where then is my hope?"

Job had always known that the claim "man is a maggot" would end conversation because it denies the relevance of what, for Job, is the ultimate grounds of any human conversation. As Job looks at the world, there is an equation between the notion that "man is a maggot" and the claim that the surface view of things as it reveals itself to human thought is of no ultimate relevance. Since the surface is the surface precisely because it is a surface for man, it has no other being than to be the beginning for man. In spite of the constant strife within Job's soul, caused by the contradictory claims of both the surface world on the one hand, and the fear of the Lord on the other to be "the beginning of wisdom." What is first for man as such must be the beginning of human conversation.

Conversation, then, must come to an end precisely because Job has no proof that he is not a maggot. If the surface world made perfect sense, he would know that he was not a maggot; but it does not make perfect sense. It is full of enigmas and contradictions, and yet for Job it makes too much sense to be forgotten.

And now, what of Bildad? He was always the most understanding, but now, he was the one to make the final break. We ask ourselves why. Perhaps the first thing to notice is that while he has totally abandoned any attempt to come to terms with Job, Bildad has never condemned him personally.

He seems to have learned from Job that any attempt to find a compromise on the question of the status of the surface world would be meaningless.

“Look high as the moon, nothing shines. Even the stars are not pure in His sight.” Bildad has taken the other path. “Nothing shines” and “man is a maggot!” Bildad has seen that the only viable counter-position to Job requires diminishing the status of both man and the visible universe.

To put it otherwise, Bildad began back in Chapter 8 with the position that no single man, by himself, has a sufficiently large horizon to think as Job thinks. Only the wider horizon supplied by the wisdom of the ages will do as the foundation of human thought. He now sees the position as untenable. If a single man’s horizon is necessarily too confined, it can only mean that the human horizon as such, including that of the fathers, is defective. Man is a worm and has only a worm’s-eye view.

Nonetheless, he has not condemned Job. Why? Is it because he too knows that he cannot prove that he is right and hence that Job is wrong?

3. Thus two old friends part.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

1 Then Job answered and said: **2** “Oh why must you try to help when you are so powerless? You would save me with a mighty arm, but you have not the strength!” **3** What kind of advice is it that you give without wisdom, providing guidance to every passer by. **4** To whom have you uttered all these words? Whose spirit is it that has been coming out of you?²

5 Ancient specters writhe beneath the waters and its denizens.³ **6** The Pit stands naked before Him and there is no cover for Abaddon. **7** He stretches the northern lands out over the chaos and suspends the earth above the nothingness.⁴ **8** He binds up the waters in thickened murk, and yet the cloud is not burst by them.⁵ **9** He covers over the face of his throne, shrouding it in His clouds. **10** He cuts a boundary round the face of the waters reaching out to where the light finds its end in darkness. **11** The pillars of heaven tremble, astounded by His rebuke. **12** By His power the sea comes to rest. By His skill He struck down Rahaba. **13** By His breath⁶ the heavens turn fair. His hands have made the fleeing serpent writhe. **14** Yet these are but a touch of His way, only a whisper of what can be heard in Him. Oh the thunder of His mighty deeds, who can reflect upon it!”⁷

Comments

1. These are Job's last words to his friends. He has come to terms with them in his own mind now. They are all well-meaning men; Job knows that, but each must go his own way. They all want to help, but without having faced the surface of things in the way in which Job has faced it, they cannot share his question and so are powerless to help.

We may not find an answer to the question, "Does seeing come from having the strength to look, or does the strength to look come from the having seen?" We may not find an answer because there may be no answer; there may only be the going back and forth, each time deeper and deeper, each time richer and richer. To ask, as children sometimes do, "Who started it?" may be to be carried off into the realm of an infinite regress. Is it that we do not see because we have not looked, or have we not looked because nothing has caught our eye? Or is it that something else has caught the eyes or the ears of Eliphaz and the others?

2. Asking this question is critical to our understanding of why the dialogue has ceased. Job implies that it is not their own spirit that has been coming out of them. Their voice is not homegrown because it did not arise from within their own horizons. Our own voice, for Job, is the only voice able to articulate all those blurred and obscured thoughts which are first stirred up from within our own particular partial awareness of the surface of things as it lies within our own particular shaggy and ill-defined horizon. Other thoughts may have a brilliant central focus, but when they have been poured from one mind into another, they lose that particular periphery which once connected them to the land in which they were born. For this reason there are no pathways which could lead one back to his own horizons and beyond. Too often, what is a living thought for the teacher becomes a hardened dogma for the student precisely because he cannot reach out to the horizon but is continually forced to return to the center which he can repeat in comfortable repetition.

3. Job is alone now. He is finally free, free to settle down and live in his surface world, but something, some ancient specter, older by far than he, begins to writhe, or dance, or to give birth, for the Hebrew word means all of those things, beneath it.

4. Job is beginning to reflect upon the fact that his surface world is nothing more than just that, a surface, a thing in need of support from within. The question is whether this surface is a veneer, only intended to support human existence at its most minimal level, or whether it is an integral external appearance through which whatever lies beneath it can reveal itself. At question is not the absolute truth of the surface, but its relevance as a beginning point in the search for the truth.

For the present, Job has only focused on the surface, but he is beginning to feel disturbed, and to wonder how his world can be more than "A northern land stretched the out over the chaos or an earth suspended above the nothingness."

I suspect that Eliphaz might have looked at things in just that way. For him, the human view of the surface has been so contorted by man's perversion that nothing behind it can be recovered. A New Heaven and a New Earth must be revealed to him before he can proceed.

5. Not only does Job have no account of the existence of his world, he also sees it as a fragile realm, constantly under the threat of all those forces that could, and yet do not, destroy it. Job can neither account for nor doubt the relevance of his surface world.

6. or "spirit"

7. The shaggy limit of Job's clarity ebbs its way into darkness and obscurity. God has shrouded from man the source of his own existence, and he cannot tell what gives his little world its solidity.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

1 And again Job took up his proverb and said: **2** "By the life of that God who has thrown aside all my [claims for] justice,¹ the Almighty has embittered my soul!² **3** Yet so long as there is breath within me, or the spirit of God in my nostrils, **4** never will my lips speak any injustice, or my tongue utter deceit. **5** No, I'll not pretend that you have been just. Even till I perish, I shall not turn my simplicity from me. **6** I shall not disavow my integrity, but cling tight to my righteousness and not let go. For my heart has never felt pangs of reproach.³

7 My enemies⁴ are as the wicked and he that rises up against me as the unjust **8** for what hope does the impious man have when he is cut off, when God will have drained away his soul. **9** Will God hear his cries when trouble comes his way, **10** or when he rejoices in the Almighty, even if he should call upon God at all times? **11** But I will teach you what is in the hands of God, and what belongs to the Almighty I shall not conceal. **12** Well, you have all seen what has happened. Oh, why are you so utterly useless?

13 Such is the lot of the guilty man ('adam) from God, a heritage from the Almighty set aside for those who can terrorize. **14** If his sons become great, the sword will be out for them, for his offspring will never be satisfied with bread. **15** When death buries those that remain, even their widows shall not weep. **16** If he should pile up silver like dust, and lay out his clothing as if it were clay, **17** then once he has laid it out, the righteous shall wear it, and the innocent will share the silver. **18** He built his house like a moth. It's like a shack that some night watchman might make. **19** He lies down, a rich man, but nothing more will be gathered, for when his eyes are opened all will be gone. **20** Terrors will overtake him like a flood of waters, and by night a sea-storm will make off with him. **21** The east wind will hoist⁵ him up and be on its way. It will sweep him from his place, **22** turn and hurl itself at him without mercy. With the whole of

32 · Interpretation

his spirit he flees from its hand. **23** But it claps down its palm upon him and whistles him off from his place.”

Comments

1. *Mis^hpat^h*; Here is clearly an instance in which one might be tempted to use the word “right.”

2. Job has seen a great deal, but when he returns to his own immediate world, the claims of justice still loom above him. There is great poignancy when Job swears by all that is holy that all that is holy is also unjust. This is the conflict that has given rise to the bitterness in Job’s soul.

3. Gratitude is forced to manifest itself as ingratitude. The spirit of God, as it manifests itself in Job’s nostrils, can show gratitude for its value and integrity only by clinging to that integrity in spite of the fact that the result of that act appears as ingratitude.

4. It is so hard to know how we are to understand verses 7 through 10. If, however, one takes it to be Job’s account of how the world once looked to him, it begins to come in better focus.

There was a time when Job was an integral part of the human world around him. He shared its views and he shared its trust. There was a kind of simplicity in his ways which could sense mock piety. In verse 5 he maintains that there has been no essential change in his simplicity, although it has suddenly found itself under an alien horizon.

5. “raise”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

1 “There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is made pure. **2** Iron is taken from the earth¹; and the rock is made to flow with copper. **3** Man² brings an end to the darkness. He explores everything to its limit, even to this rock of murk and the Shadow of Death. **4** Far from any habitation, he blasts out channels. Abandoned by every passer by, destitute of all humanity,³ they wander.⁴

5 There is a land which gives us our daily bread, but underneath it churns like fire.⁵ **6** Its stones are the home of sapphires, and its dust is of gold. **7** No bird of prey knows the trails. The eye of the falcon has never caught sight of it, **8** nor have the sons of pride ever trampled it over. The lion can bear it no witness,⁶ **9** but man has put his hand to the flint and overturned its mountains by the root. **10** He rips open channels through the rocks.⁷ His eye sees every precious thing. **11** He binds up the flowing rivers and the hidden things come to light.⁸

12 Yet wisdom, where can she be found?⁹ Which is the place of understanding? **13** No mortal knows its value. Nor can it be found in the land of the living.

14 The Deep says ‘It is not within me’; and the Sea says ‘I have it not.’ **15** It cannot be gotten for gold, nor silver be weighed out as its price. **16** It cannot be measured by the gold of Ophir, or by the precious onyx, or by sapphire. **17** Nor gold nor glass can match its value; nor vessels of fine gold be its wage. **18** Neither crystal nor coral can call it to mind, for gathering wisdom is more precious than pearls. **19** The topaz of Nubia cannot express its value nor can its weight be taken in pure gold.¹⁰

20 Wisdom, where does she come from? Which is the place of understanding? **21** She is hidden from the eye of every living thing. She is concealed even, from the birds of heavens.¹¹ **22** Abaddon and Death have said, ‘We have heard only rumors of it with our ears.’ **23** But GOD¹² understands the way to it; He knows the place, **24** for He can look to the ends of the earth, and see all things that are under the sky.¹³ **25** When He established the weight of the wind, and set out the waters according to its measure, **26** when he gave a law for the rain and a passageway for the voice of the thunderbolt, **27** then it was that He saw it, counted it, measured it, and delved into it. **28** And then He said unto man (*‘adam*), ‘Behold, FEAR of the Lord,¹⁴ that is Wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.’¹⁵

Comments

1. “dust”
2. “He”
3. “mortals”

4. This, one of the most beautiful passages in the book, could be read as the first Ode to Man. Few works in literature have praised in such elegant speech the Baconian ideals of the conquest of nature. Job sees this apparent greatness as an image of his own quest. Men have looked beneath the surface. It is their glory. They, too, have left the land of human habitation as Job has left his friends and with them all of human society. By their own powers they have dug down under the surface and found a world of riches which they have conquered and made their own; but what of Job?

5. According to this view, the surface of nature, the one Job has committed himself to, gives little indication of the true nature of the world. The “land which gives us our daily bread” and in which, or perhaps one should say on which, we live our daily lives, is a much too meager horizon to form the basis of meaningful human conversation. Its inner churnings must first be searched out.

6. Man can force nature to reveal itself to him in ways in which it is not capable of revealing itself to itself. Man can overcome nature, and hence he can overcome the paltriness of his own nature. In this sense, man is not a part of

34 · *Interpretation*

nature, not because of any perversion in his nature, but because he can conquer and rule over nature.

7. Even man's plan to reveal nature is not supplied by nature. There are no veins in the rock to guide his way. He must rip it open by his own might.

8. From Job until Faust, containing the inundation of chaotic waters has been the symbol of man's understanding of and control over the world in which he lives.

9. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Chapter 28 lies in the care which Job has taken in thinking through and articulating both sides. One cannot but be moved by verses 1 through 11, yet the bare mention of the first word of the next verse, "Yet wisdom," is sufficient to turn things quite the other way round.

10. Verses 12 through 18 are magnificent in their ability to reveal simultaneously both the richness and the poverty of the undertaking.

11. Men can only dig beneath the surface, but even if, like birds, they could fly above it, it would do them no good.

12. This is the first time we have met the word "GOD" since Chapter 2. Morphologically it is a plural and is commonly used outside the Book of Job to refer to the one God of Israel. The word "God" is in the singular, and can have a more generic meaning.

13. In these passages, Job seems to be trying to restate for himself the arguments of the others in terms that fit into the world as he has been able to see it up till now.

Unlike man, GOD has a complete view of an all-encompassing horizon. Man's horizons, by contrast, are limited, and their edges are hazy. Rumors from beyond seep in and obscure pathways lead out. What we see implies either "that" or "what" we have not seen. The ambiguity of whether it is a "what" or merely a "that" is central to the reading of the book. Job's question is whether a man of care can rummage through his shrouded way and begin to pierce beyond his own horizon, or whether man is faced with a gulf he cannot pass.

14. This is the only time in the text that the word "Lord" will appear. The word "LORD," which we frequently saw in Chapters 1 and 2, and which will begin to re-emerge in Chapter 38, is something like a personal name for the God of Israel. The root seems to be a word meaning "to be" or "to become." The distinction between the two, "being" and "becoming" can be made in Hebrew, but not with the clarity that one has in either Greek or English.

The word "Lord" is a very common word for the God of Israel outside the Book of Job, especially in the Book of Psalms, although it occurs here for the only time in Job. Its literal meaning is "my Lords." In the singular it is often used to apply to human beings, and its meaning lies somewhere between the two English words "mister" and "master."

15. The structure and sense of the verse, together with what has been pointed out in the last two notes give it the ring of a quotation from psalmic literature. If this suspicion is true, it would add to the notion that this chapter is not to be

read as a simple recantation on the part of Job, but more of an attempt to restate the thoughts of others in terms that make sense to him in order to come to grips with his awareness of the partial nature of his own grasp of the whole.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

1 And again Job took up his proverb and said:¹ **2** “Who can return to the months gone by, to the days when God watched over me, **3** when His lamp shone over my head and I walked in the darkness by His light; **4** back to my autumnal days when God was at home in my tent, **5** when the Almighty was yet with me, and I with my lads all about me; **6** to when my feet were bathed in cream, and the rock poured out its streams of oil for me?”²

7 When I went to the city gates and was about to take my seat on the square, **8** the young men would see me and retire, the elders rose and stood. **9** Princes refrained from words and put their hands over their mouths. **10** The voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to their palate, **11** for an ear had heard and it blessed me; an eye had seen and it approved, **12** because I had saved a poor man when he cried out, and an orphan when there was no one else to help him. **13** The blessings of those who had been lost came to me, and I made the widow’s heart sing. **14** I put on judgment, and it covered me. A just cause fit like a coat or a hat. **15** I became eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. **16** I was a father to the needy, and often I would search out a case for a man whom I did not even know. **17** I would break the jaw of the unjust and wrest the prey from his teeth.³

18 I thought to myself; ‘I shall perish in my own little nest,⁴ my days having multiplied as sand,’ **19** ‘My roots opening me up to the waters, and the dew resting upon my branches.’ **20** My dignity was ever fresh, my bow would renew itself in my hand. **21** Men would hear me and wait in expectation, falling silent to hear my counsel. **22** After I had spoken they had no changes. My words fell gently upon them. **23** They waited for me in expectation as for the rain; their mouths opened wide as if to catch the spring rain. **24** I joked with them a bit so that my kindness would not overwhelm them because they had no self-confidence.⁵ **25** I chose their way, and sat as chief. I dwelt as a king among his troops or as one who has compassion for mourners.

Comments

1. “And again Job took up his proverb and said”: The only other chapter that began with that formulation was 27. That time, it followed the passage 26:5–14 which began “Ancient specters writhe beneath the sea and its denizens.” This time it follows the passage, “There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is made pure.”

The two “digging” passages are still understood to be apart from his “proverb,” which I take to refer to the rest of Job’s speech. The implication seems to be that Job has yet to grasp any relationship between his surface world and the world that he has discovered lying beneath it.

2. In the last chapter, Job had seen men dig beneath their own surface, and by their own digging, discover a new world as yet unseen by any human eye. He had seen it done and knew what it meant. But this knowledge only caused him to doubt his own ability to search behind his own surface in the most decisive respect.

Perhaps he had made a mistake in banishing the deceptive beauty of the day of his birth. The seeming was good. Job was already in his autumnal days, retired, and ready to curl up by the fire. Spring and summer had come and gone. He had raised a good crop of fellow citizens, manuring them well with justice and kindness. The seeming was good.

3. This is the most complete picture we get of what life had been for Job before his world began to fall apart. A just cause fit like a favorite old coat or a hat. Being just was natural and comfortable for Job, and the world he knew fit around it.

4. This line in its context, together with verse 4, is, as it were, one of Job’s main credentials for being who he is. The implication is that the ability and love of ruling men well, plus the willingness to relinquish that rule when the time has come to do so, is what both forces and what allows Job to face the surface of things with dignity and concern.

5. Greenberg translates: “When I smiled at them, they would not believe it; they never expected a sign of my favor.”

The Revised Standard translates: “I smiled on them when they had no confidence and the light of my countenance they did not cast down.”

The first problem is that *yappilun* may come from *pll*, which normally means “to pray” or “to intervene,” but see Genesis 48:11, “I never expected to see your face.” This is how Greenberg takes it. It could as well come from *npl*, “to fall,” however, and in the causative form could mean either “to cast down” or “to overthrow or disarm.”

A further problem is whether *un* is an objective (the proposed translation) or a subjective (The Revised Standard) ending.