

The Book of Job

Translation and Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Note

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

CHAPTER ONE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1:1 He was a simple and straightforward man, a GOD-fearing man who turned away from evil.
- 2:3 Then THE LORD said to the Satan: "Did you happen to notice my man Job. There is no one like him on Earth. He is a simple and straightforward man, a GOD-fearing man and one who turns away from evil."
- 1:5 He himself would get up early in the morning to make burnt offerings for each of his children; for "Perhaps," Job said, "my children have sinned, and cursed GOD in their hearts."
- 1:6 One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves before THE LORD, and the Satan came along with them.
- 2:1 One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves before THE LORD, and the Satan came along with them.
- 1:9 Then the Satan answered THE LORD and said: "What, do you think that Job FEARS GOD for nothing?"
- 1:22 But throughout all that Job never sinned or even charged GOD with folly.
- 2:9 "Curse GOD and die!"
- 2:10 "If we accept the good from GOD, must we not also accept the evil?"

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

The term first comes up in the story of Balaam:

- Num. 22:21 So Balaam rose in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. But God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as his ADVERSARY. Now he was riding on the ass, and his two servants were with him.
- Num. 22:32 And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your ass these three times? Behold, I have come forth to WITHSTAND you, because your way is perverse before me;"

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

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

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

- 1Sam. 29:4 But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him; and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him; he shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an ADVERSARY to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here?"
- 2Sam. 19:21 Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD'S anointed?" But David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall any one be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here too, the Adversary is claiming a certain innocence.

14. "slave" or "servant"

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

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

CHAPTER TWO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But throughout all that Job never sinned in speech.

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

Comments

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

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

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

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

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

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

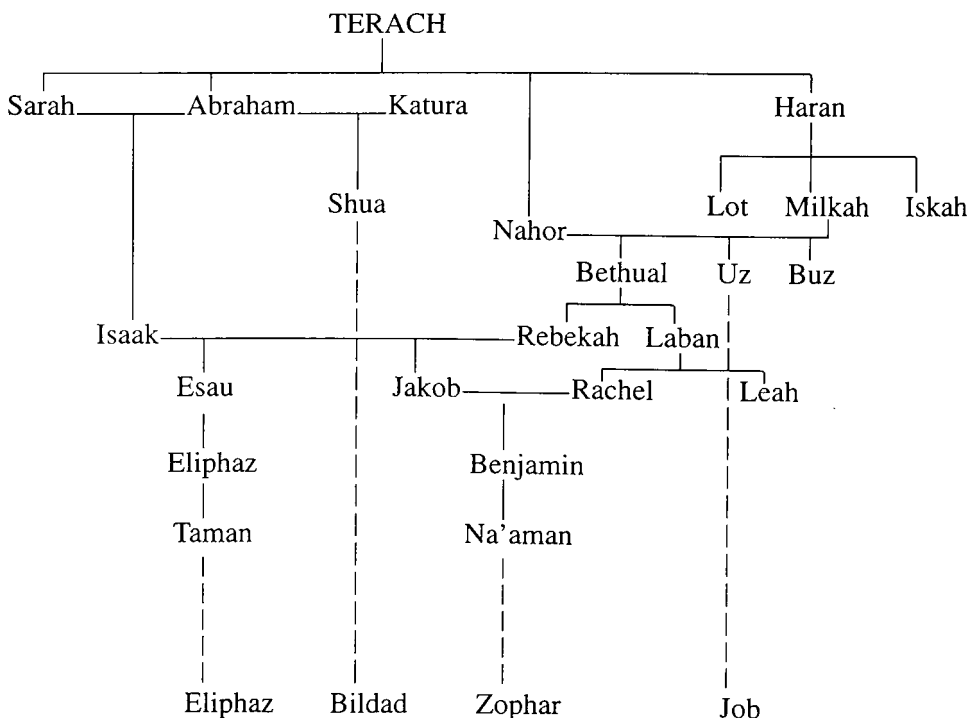
In light of the importance that the imagery of skin gains throughout the main body of the book, one is sorely tempted to believe that its author was the author of at least this phrase as well, but, of course, that is not the kind of thing that one can know.

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

4. In English, “Yemen.”

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER THREE

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

2. Throughout we have distinguished between:

ne'ebhad to be lost

math to die

gawa' to perish

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eliphaz

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

Job 15:35 Their belly brews deceit.

Zophar

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

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

Elihu

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER FOUR

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

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

Comments

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

2. See note to 33:15.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. or “slaves.”

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

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

CHAPTER FIVE

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

3. Literally “pierced.”

4. The text is very obscure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. living things

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

10. Literally "sin."

CHAPTER SIX

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Job, then, is also asking the question: "But did I ever say to you 'Deliver me from the hand of narrowness?'"

13. The word used implies a wrong done inadvertently.

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

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

CHAPTER SEVEN

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

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

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

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

2. dust

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. See the note to Job 11:6.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER EIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. "show its majestic pride."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER NINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

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

3. "RAGE."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Or “I cannot trust.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER TEN

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

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

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

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

Comments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Book of Job

Translation and Commentary

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

1 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said, **2** “Will this multitude of words never be answered? Must the man with the quick lip¹ always be in the right? **3** Do you think that this claptrap of yours should bring all men to silence? Do you really believe you can mock without being rebuked? **4** You say ‘My tenets are spotless. I am pure in Thy sight.’ **5** Oh, if only God Himself would open His lips and speak to you, **6** tell you the secrets of wisdom: for discernment is many sided,² and you must know that God will bear some of your perversions³ for you.

7 The deepest things of God, can you find them out? Would you discover the utmost things of The Almighty? **8** It is higher than heaven—what can you do? deeper than the Pit—what can you know? **9** Longer than the earth is its measure and broader than the sea.⁴ **10** If He should pass by and separate⁵ or close up, who can turn him back? **11** He knows the worthless man. Can he see wickedness and not ponder it? **12** Hollow man will become thoughtful when the wild ass gives birth to a man (*‘adam’*).

13 But, if you direct your heart firmly and spread out your hands to Him **14** and if, when there is wickedness in your hand, you remove it, and let no injustice dwell in your tent, **15** then shall you bear your countenance high above all blemish. You will be firm and have no FEAR. **16** You will forget all toil and think of it only as water that has flown by. **17** Life will arise out of the noonday sun and soar as the morning. **18** You will be secure because there will be hope. You will burrow in and lie at ease. **19** You will be in repose and none shall make you afraid.⁶

Many will seek your favor. **20** But the eyes of the guilty will fail. For them, all escape is lost, and their one hope is to exhale the spirit.”

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

Comments

1. Literally, "a man of lips," and clearly intended to be derogatory.

2. The force, and hence the deceptive force, of human speech is its ability to speak of a part, even a random part, as if it were an intelligible whole. Job's arguments presuppose that there is a surface and that it is sufficiently open to human comprehension to serve as an adequate foundation for human existence. But there may be many such surfaces, not one of which fails to obscure some vital part of the whole. The things within our ken, while they seem to hold together in a beguiling sort of way, may be required to be so modified by what is beyond it, as to render all human judgment inadequate to the point of meaninglessness. The spotless, when seen within a larger context may no longer seem to be so.

3. This word, which has traditionally been translated "iniquity," tends to be used in a rather specific way in the Torah, and it is not impossible that Zophar has in mind a distinction which the Torah makes between '*awon* or "perversion," and *het* or "sin." *Het* means "to miss the mark," while '*awon* comes from a root meaning "to twist," "to distort" or "pervert." It is something that can be done to a "path," or to "the right," or to a mind, and hence implies an effect on all future growth. One refers to an act, the other to a way of being.

Consider:

Deu. 5:9 . . . visiting the perversion, of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.

Contrast this verse with

Deu. 24:16 Fathers shall not be put to death for their children nor shall children not be put to death for their fathers, but each man shall die for his own sin.

From Deuteronomy 24:16 it is clear that no one can be held responsible for the "sins" of his or her own particular parent, but with "perversion" it is a different matter.

In the Torah there is a general tendency to use the word '*awon* to refer to those acts of the fathers which have a lasting and devastating effect on the whole of the nation: for example, black slavery in early America. Or, to put it in other words, even an immigrant who has newly become a citizen of this country, although he, like all others, is innocent of any crime his father may have committed, has, by virtue of becoming part of us, inherited a debt to the Native American peoples, a debt which we shall never be able to pay in full.

There is also another aspect to the question. The more one thinks about the problem of perversion, the more complicated and almost insoluble it becomes.

The sons have committed a great crime; but in their tradition, it was no crime. They have been twisted by their tradition, and the suffering falls on the whole of the community, guilty and innocent alike. How then to apportion blame? How to end the cycle? I sometimes think that the Bible is being terribly optimistic when it implies that an answer can be found in only three or four generations.

One might want to rethink what the ancients may have meant when they spoke of “a curse on a house” by considering what the moderns mean by the term “family syndromes” with regard to alcoholism or child abuse.

It should be noted that when seen in a fuller context, the quotation from Deuteronomy clearly contends that good traditions, if well founded, tend to last longer than bad ones; but it also implies that if the world were not sticky enough to hold on to the bad ones for a little while, the good ones would never have a chance either.

This second aspect of the problem, however, is not part of the story to be told in this note. Here we shall be speaking of the debt which, from the point of view of the Torah, we all owe, guilty or innocent of any sin or crime.

Although we must still leave open the question of whether there is sufficient evidence to claim that the author of the Book of Job was aware of that tradition, the tenor of Zophar’s argument is so close to the thoughts contained in the tradition that I thought it not amiss to include this note. The feeling that Zophar is portrayed as being aware of the tradition is enhanced by the fact that he is the only one in the dialogue to use the enigmatic phrase “to bear a perversion,” which, as we shall see, is so critical for the Torah.

The reader cannot but notice the ambiguity in the word “bear.” A man can “bear a perversion” on his shoulders, or another can “bear/lift that perversion” off those shoulders, that is, he may forgive him; but then he may have to “bear the perversion” on his own shoulders.

Let us begin by looking for ourselves at a complete list of the passages in the Torah in which the word occurs:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Gen. 4:13 | My perversion is too great for me to bear. |
| Gen. 15:16 | The perversion of the Amorites is not yet complete. |
| Gen. 19:15 | . . . lest you [Lot] be consumed on account of the perversion of the city [Sodom]. |
| Gen. 44:16 | God has found out the perversion of your servant. Therefore we will be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the chalice was found. |
| Exo. 20:5 | I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the sons and the son’s son, to the third and the fourth [generation] of those that hate me and showing loving kindness to a thousand [generations] of those that love me and keep my commandments. |
| Exo. 28:38 | and he [Aaron] shall bear the perversion of the holy things |
| Exo. 28:43 | . . . lest they bear the perversion and die. |

- Exo. 34:6 The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth, keeping steadfast love for thousands, bearing perversion and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the son and the son's son, to the third and the fourth [generation]."
- Exo. 34:9 If I have found favor . . . pardon our perversion and our sins [Moses].
- Lev. 5:1 If anyone sins in that he hears a call to come testify, and he was a witness because he had either seen the affair or knew about it but does not speak up, he shall bear his perversion.
- Lev. 5:17 If anyone sins in that he does any one of all the things which the Lord commanded him not to do and is unaware, he is guilty and he shall bear his perversion. But he may bring a ram to the priest . . .
- Lev. 7:18 If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him; it shall be an abomination, and he who eats of it shall bear his perversion.
- Lev. 10:17 Why did you not eat the sin [offering] in the holy place because it is the holiest of the holy and it was given to you to bear the perversion of the congregation to make atonement for them before the Lord?
- Lev. 16:21 And Aaron shall place his two hands on the head of the live goat and confess over him all the perversions of the children of Israel and their sins . . .
- Lev. 17:16 If he [one who eats what dies of itself or is torn by beasts] does not wash them [his clothes] and bathe his flesh, he shall bear his perversion.
- Lev. 18:25 The land became defiled and so I punished its perversions.
- Lev. 19:8 Anyone who eats it [a sacrifice left till the third day] he shall bear his perversion because he has profaned the holy things of the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from his people.
- Lev. 20:17 A man who takes his sister . . . has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his perversion.
- Lev. 20:19 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's near kin; they shall bear their perversion.
- Lev. 22:14 And if a man eat of the holy thing unwittingly, then he shall put the fifth part thereof unto it, and shall give it unto the priest with the holy thing.
- Lev. 25:15 . . . and they shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel, which they offer unto the LORD;
- Lev. 22:16 Or suffer then to bear the iniquity of trespass, when they eat their holy things: for I the LORD do sanctify them.
- Lev. 26:38–42 You will be lost among the nations and the land of your enemies shall devour [eat] you. Whoever among you is left will rot away on account of their perversion in the land of their enemies. Yea, on

account of the perversion of their fathers they shall rot away along with them. But if they confess their perversion . . . I will remember . . .

Num. 5:10ff. And the Lord said to Moses. Say to the people of Israel, if any man's wife goes astray, . . . then shall the man bring his wife to the priest and bring the offering required of her, a tenth of an ephah of barley meal: he shall pour no oil upon it, for it is a cereal offering of jealousy a cereal offering of remembrance, bringing perversion to remembrance.

Num. 5:29 This is the law in case of jealousy, when a wife, though under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall set the woman before the Lord and the priest shall execute upon her all this law. The man shall be free from perversion but the woman shall bear her perversion.

Num. 14:18 And now I pray thee let the power of the Lord be great as thou hast promised, saying; "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, bearing perversion and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Num. 14:19 Pardon the perversion of this people . . . I have pardoned . . .

Num. 14:34 According to the number of days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your perversion.

Num. 15:31 If a soul raises his hand [and murders] . . . his perversion is upon him.

Num. 18:1 And the Lord said to Aaron, you, and your sons, and the house of your father with you, bear the perversion of the holy place, and you, and your sons with you, bear the perversion of your priesthood.

Num. 18:21ff. To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, . . . But the Levites shall do the service in the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their perversion and it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; and among the people of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

Deu. 5:9 For I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the perversion of the father upon the children and the children's children . . .

Deu. 19:15 A single witness shall not raise up against any man for any perversion or any sin . . .

The first time the word is used in the Bible, or one might even say the original perversion, was Cain's act of fratricide.

Gen. 4:13 My perversion is too great for me to bear.

The fact that the first perversion was committed by the founder of the first city is indicative of the notion that perversion, as distinguished from sin, is a communal matter.

Now it must be remembered that our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds, living in tents, and even Lot when he flees the hills for the city thinks it is right to excuse himself by saying, "Yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is only a little one." Even he knows that God has not yet prepared the way for the city, and that it is no place for a good man, but he is overcome by fear.

For the Bible, the two, fratricide and the founding of the city, fall together in this wise. Cain, first a farmer, then a founder, put up a fence and then a city wall to distinguish "the mine" from "the thine." This act of radical self-establishment required that he cut himself off and obliterate all of his ties to the rest of God's creation. The shepherd's life, on the other hand, freely roams throughout the whole without laying claim to any particular part of the whole. It is at home, but it has no home. Cain's act of building a fence, as all farmers must, is an essentially political act. By setting up a part and making it into a whole, it denies the availability of the given whole, either for oneself, or another. Cain wishes to establish his own world in the fullest sense possible.

As a further consequence of the problem of development, the Bible presents the arts, too, as having their origin in Cain's perversion, since they are seen as a product of the city.

Gen. 4:20–22 Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Of course, one day there will be the holy city of Jerusalem, but it will take many years and many books to work out the legitimization of the city. Although the recounting of that story would lead us too far out of our path, we shall in time be forced to reconsider the arts and how the perverse becomes transformed into the holy. (For a more extended account of this subject, see my commentary on Genesis.)

Cain's act, because it is at the center of the illegitimate origins of communal society, then becomes the nexus of what the Bible means by perversion. Since the only way of populating such a self-made world is via incest with one that is most like oneself, lying with a sister is also called, not a sin, but a perversion.

Lev. 20:17 A man who takes his sister . . . has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his perversion.

The connection between perversion and sisters is underlined by the fact that of the ten other illicit unions mentioned in the passage in Leviticus:

Neighbor's wife	20:10
Father's wife	20:11
Daughter-in-law	20:12
A male	20:13
Wife and her mother	20:14
A beast	20:15
A woman having her sickness	20:18
Mother's sister	20:19
Uncle's wife	20:20
Brother's wife	20:21

the only other to be specifically called a perversion also concerns a sister.

Lev. 20:19 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's near kin; they shall bear their perversion.

Except for Genesis 15:16, which we will have occasion to reflect upon later in this note, the next time the word shows up is in connection with Joseph and his brothers.

When Joseph feigned the discovery of the stolen chalice in Benjamin's bag and was about to take him prisoner, Judah said:

Gen. 44:16 God has found out the perversion of your servant. Therefore we will be slaves to my lord, both we and the one in whose hand the chalice was found.

Clearly enough, when Judah spoke of the perversion, he was not thinking of the stolen chalice, but of the fratricide which had almost taken place so many years before.

Gen. 37:17 And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild beast has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Again, the text in 44:16 indicates a relation between fratricide and perversion. Yet, in Judah's words, we can also begin to see some way out.

The brothers, not taking well to Joseph's rather imperious character, decided to kill him. But Reuben was of a more affable character, and, being the eldest, thought it his duty to save Joseph's life. But Reuben was something of a bum-

bler. His plan was to have the brothers put Joseph in a pit, thinking to come back later and return the boy to his father. Judah, however, was more thoughtful. He realized that the problem would only arise again, and that the only solution was to get the boy out of the country. The only way that was possible was to persuade the brothers to sell Joseph to a passing Ishmaelite caravan.

In order to explain to Jacob what had happened, the brothers took Joseph's splendid coat, dipped it in the blood of a wild animal, brought it home to Jacob, and said, "Please to recognize" this coat. Jacob looked at the coat and said, "Indeed, a wild animal has eaten Joseph." We are only left to wonder how much Jacob understood, and what kind of a wild animal he was thinking of.

Judah thought the boy was probably safe, but after what had happened, he could no longer share a life with the others and went off with a friend, Hirah the Adullamite.

Now, Judah had a daughter-in-law named Tamar, whose two husbands, both sons of Judah, had died. Tamar felt it her duty to raise a seed in memory of those sons, but Judah had denied her. She then threw off her widow's weeds and, dressing as a whore and standing at the city gate, she waited until Judah and Hirah came along. Judah slept with her and promised to send her a kid as payment. In pledge, she demanded his signet, his cord, and his staff. But when Judah returned with the kid, no whore was to be found at the city gate.

Some time later, Judah heard that his daughter-in-law was about to have a child by harlotry and demanded that she be publicly burnt. But when Tamar appeared, she produced the signet and the cord and the staff, and said, "Please to recognize" these objects.

Those words, "Please to recognize"—he had heard them once before. Time suddenly became jumbled for Judah. Was it now, or was it then? Who was speaking? Was Tamar speaking to him, or was it himself speaking to his father Jacob? What was it that he was to "recognize"? Was it the coat, or the staff, or was it something else? He had learned from her something about responsibility and was ready to return to his brothers. For Judah, that return meant that perversion, unlike sin or guilt, was a thing to be shared among brothers, guilty and innocent alike.

This sense of shared responsibility, and its relation to the concept of perversion, only emerges slowly from the text. Perhaps one of the more tangible aspects of the problem can be seen in the following verse:

Lev. 5:1 If anyone sins in that he hears a call to come testify, and he was a witness because he had either seen the affair or knew about it but does not speak up, he shall bear his perversion.

This is, perhaps, not the deepest sense of togetherness that Judah was feeling, yet even here we can see how an otherwise innocent man might find himself responsible because of where and when and with whom he happened to be, regardless of how he had acted at the time.

There is one other aspect of perversion that comes out of the same chapter in Leviticus.

Lev. 5:17 If anyone sins in that he does any one of all the things which the Lord commanded him not to do and is unaware, he is guilty and he shall bear his perversion. But he may bring a ram to the priest . . .

and another like it.

Lev. 22:14–16 And if a man eat of a holy thing unknowingly . . . and so cause them to bear the perversion and guilt by eating their holy things.

Here, perversion seems to be intimately connected with lack of awareness. In order to make sense of the passage, I believe that the reader is meant to assume that the text is dealing with a case in which the actor was in no position to be aware of his crime, and that his lack of awareness was not due to any insensitivity on his part.

Since he was unaware of the sin at the time of the act and only knows about it by hearsay and, as it were, from the outside, he cannot feel any guilt or repentance in the normal sense of the word. He can, of course, feel a deep sense of sorrow because of the result, and a need to undo any wrong, but that is not the same. He nevertheless still feels a strange kind of guilt, however, because he now knows that he has benefitted from an unjust act. At the same time, since there is no need for repentance in the normal sense of the word, there is no single act he can perform to rid himself of a sense of guilt. This seems to be one of the roots of what the Bible perceives as the human need for ritual sacrifice: “But he may bring a ram to the priest . . .”

At the very least, this law must remind one of the fact that the son may not be aware of the perversion of the father, which he nonetheless must bear insofar as it has helped to determine the shape of his life and been the source of much of what has sustained him since the day of his birth.

To face more fully the question of the relationship between ritual sacrifice and perversion, let us reconsider the passages that lead to this discussion.

In the proem to the laws of actions between man and man, God says:

Exo. 20:5 . . . You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the sons and the son's son, to the third and the fourth [generation] of those that hate me and doing loving kindness to a thousand [generations] of those that love me and keep my commandments.

But, after the affair of the golden calf, when Moses felt that he needed a greater understanding of this God in order to continue as leader, God gave him a somewhat revised version:

Exo. 34:6 The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth, keeping steadfast love for thousands, bearing perversion and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the son and the son's son, to the third and the fourth [generation]." And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped. And he said, "If now I have found favor in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and bear our perversion and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance." And he said, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels . . ."

What we have is ambiguous. We have learned that God is "a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth, keeping steadfast love for thousands, bearing perversion and transgression and sin." But on the other hand, when Moses actually asked God to "bear our perversion," God spoke of a "covenant," and of "marvels," but said not a word about "bearing our perversion."

Some time later, a very similar affair occurred. After the men that Moses had sent to spy out the land returned and told their tales, fear struck the people and they revolted.

It should be noted in passing that this particular act of rebellion was also called a perversion:

Num. 14:34 According to the number of days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your perversion.

The story of how this early act of perversion led to the necessity of conquering lands not originally intended to be part of the new nation, and the role these extraterritorial lands played hundreds of years later in the total destruction of the country at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians has already been told in my Genesis commentary. I mention the affair only because it is such a striking example of one sense of what it means to bear a perversion. This one was borne for twelve hundred years till one day it was visited upon the children of the children. But we must return to our subject and consider the second discussion between God and Moses.

It took place at the time God was about to abandon His people and start over again with Moses as the father of "a nation greater and mightier than they." After having argued the impracticality of such a plan, Moses repeated God's promise back to Him in a conversation much like the first, but with very different results:

Num. 14:17 And now, I pray thee, let the power of the Lord be great as thou hast promised, saying, "The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in

loving kindness, bearing perversion and transgression, but who will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the son and the son's son, to the third and the fourth [generation]. Bear the perversion of this people, I pray thee, according to the greatness of thy loving kindness, and according as thou hast born this people, from Egypt even until now." Then the Lord said, "I have borne, according to your word" . . . "

"I have borne, according to your word." Things have changed, and what could not have happened then, now can happen. As we shall see, that change centers on the life, and ultimately the death, of Moses' brother, Aaron.

Before we consider those things, however, there is in the Bible one other account which brings together the same elements as the story of Aaron: jealousy, perversion, the undetected, a priest, and an offering which must be consumed at the risk of pain or death, and, last of all, forgiveness and the possibility of returning to the fullness of normal life.

Since the story lives on a more human level, it might be best to begin there:

Num. 5:11-31 And the lord said to Moses. Say to the people of Israel, if any man's wife goes astray, and acts unfaithfully against him, if a man lie with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she is undetected though she has defiled herself and there is no witness against her, since she was not taken in the act; and if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him, and he is jealous of his wife who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him, and he is jealous of his wife though she had not defiled herself; then shall the man bring his wife to the priest and bring the offering required of her, a tenth of an ephah of barley meal: he shall pour no oil upon it, for it is a cereal offering of jealousy, a cereal offering of remembrance, bringing perversion to remembrance.

The priest shall bring her near and set her before the Lord, and the priest shall take the holy water in an earthenware vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it in the water. And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord and unbind the hair of the woman's head and place in her hands the cereal offering of remembrance which is a cereal offering of jealousy. And in his hand, the priest shall have the water of bitterness that brings the curse. Then the priest shall make her take an oath saying "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside to uncleanness, while you were under your husband's authority, be free from this water of bitterness that brings the curse. But if you have gone astray though you were under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband, has lain with you, [then the priest shall make the woman take the oath of the curse and say

to the woman] “the Lord make you an execration and an oath among your people when the Lord makes your thigh fall away and your body swell; may the water that brings the curse pass into your bowels and make your thigh fall away.” And the woman shall say “Amen, Amen.”

Then the priest shall write these curses in a book and wash them off into the waters of bitterness; and he shall make the woman drink the water that brings the curse and the water that brings the curse shall enter into her and cause her bitter pain. And the priest shall take the cereal offering of jealousy out of the woman’s hand and shall wave the cereal offering before the Lord and bring it to the altar; and the priest shall take a handful of the cereal offering, as its memorial portion, and burn it upon the altar, and afterward shall make the woman drink the water. And when he has made her drink the water, then, if she has defiled herself and acted unfaithfully against her husband, the water that brings the curse shall enter her and cause bitter pain, and her body shall swell and her thigh shall fall away, and the woman shall become an execration among the people. But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, then she shall be free and shall conceive children.

This is the law in case of jealousy, when a wife, though under her husband’s authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall set the woman before the Lord and the priest shall execute upon her all this law. The man shall be free from perversion but the woman shall bear her perversion.

Here we have the case of a man who suspects his wife and is jealous on little or perhaps no grounds at all. But, as we know from Othello, the green-eyed monster is hard to shake. In a case of law at court, there can be a presumption of innocence, and guilt must be proven. Within a family, however, for the sake of domestic peace, innocence must be proven. The Bible does not wish to defend that fact, but merely to deal with it. Guilt is often a very difficult thing to establish, but it is usually impossible to establish innocence. If the husband is in error, or of a bad disposition, it would be easy to say, “That’s his problem.” Unfortunately, however, it has become the wife’s problem too. The measured and austere trappings of ceremony allow the wife to pass through her trials without grave danger. The ritual is intended to be a way through which the husband can come to terms with his jealousy, so that peace can return to family life.

I believe that this law is intended to give the reader some understanding of the biblical contention that a formal ritualistic act must play a critical part in our attempt to deal with perversion.

Now is the time to retell the story of the life and the death of Aaron the Priest, and only an odd handful of quotations from our list will remain.

At one point in the middle of their first conversation, Moses had said to God

Exo. 4:10 “Oh, my Lord, I am not a man of speech, either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

We cannot understand that at first. On the contrary, the more we get to know him, the more eloquent he seems. But God does seem to have understood something, and whatever it was, it made Him very angry.

Exo. 4:11 Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

But Moses again protests,

Exo. 4:13 “Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person.” Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart.”

This is the first time we hear of Aaron, and we might be a bit surprised to hear him introduced in anger as “Aaron, your brother, the Levite.” This anger might lead us back to remember the first pair of brothers, and might even momentarily cause us to remember how their own father, Levi, once treated his newly adopted brothers, the men of Shechem; but these ominous feelings soon pass, and when the two first meet, the occasion is quite joyous.

The pair did well. The slaves were freed, and slavery is a terrible thing. What they did was right, even marvelous, but after it was over there were many pieces still to be picked up. Even before they escaped Egypt, they were reminded of the harm suffered by the innocent among the guilty on the other side. Such is the norm in all countries, but Israel had been commanded not to let it fall from memory.

Exo. 13:15 For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.

After the escape, they came to a water hole at Marah, but the water was bitter and the people complained. God didn’t make much of a fuss though. He just showed Moses a tree, and Moses seemed to know instinctively what to do. He threw it in and the water turned sweet. God was hoping the people would see how foolish they had been when they came to twelve springs just around the bend at Elim. There had been no need for the miracle.

Then there was the affair of the manna and after that more complaints about water. On that day, the people showed that they were incapable of trusting to the given course of things, but would need miracles, and so the Lord said to Moses,

Exo. 17:5f. Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand the rod with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink.

“Strike”: second person, imperative, singular; “Strike.” We must remember that.

After a war with Amaleq, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, appeared. By an argument quite similar to the one found in Aristotle’s *Politics*, he convinced Moses that the rule of law is best. On the one hand, no law can be so fashioned as to be able to deal adequately with each of the infinite number of convoluted cases which can arise in the course of human affairs as well as the wise man can, so long as he may face them one by one. But wise men are not always available, and when they are, the work soon becomes too great for any one person. Laws, then, are needed to guide others. So Moses made preparations, ascended Mount Sinai, and received the Law. This was the law that Jethro had spoken of. Although it has a proem, what we sometimes call the Ten Commandments, the bulk of the law proper, Exodus 21–23, is essentially a law governing the actions of men in their relations with other men.

When Moses returned he told the words that he had heard to the people, and only after they had agreed to follow them, did he write them all down in the Book of the Covenant.

Exo. 24:7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

Thus it seems to have been important to Moses that these laws be accepted before they could be committed to writing and then read again aloud in a great ceremony once they had been written down.

Exo. 24:3ff. Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young lads from among the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in the basin, and half of the blood he threw against

the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

But Moses' sacrifice led to a strange event concerning two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu.

Exo. 24:9ff. Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Moses' ceremony, which had nowhere been commanded, had somehow gone awry. Some readers may sense it in verse 10, others not until the end of verse 11, but most of us feel nothing until it hits us in the middle of the Book of Numbers. God, however, saw the problem at once, and immediately called Moses back up to the mountain to give him a second set of laws called the Tablets of Stone.

What God saw most clearly in the actions of Nadab and Abihu, and which Moses failed to see, was a certain wildness in the human soul which no law governing the action between man and man could abolish. From the biblical point of view, this wildness is a strange melange of the highest and the lowest there is in the human soul. It is the human need to sacrifice.

First, we remember that neither Cain, nor Abel, nor Noah was asked to give a sacrifice. The idea was of human origin. It is a wild nest of interwoven contradictions. We wish to become the whole by destroying the other; we wish to submerge ourselves into the whole by symbolically destroying ourselves in the form of the other. We give ourselves unto God, and we bribe Him.

When God saw that wildness in Nadab and Abihu, He quickly turned to Moses:

Exo. 24:12 The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the TABLETS OF STONE, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."

The next seven chapters give an account of the plan for the building of the tabernacle and the installation of its priests. It meets the needs of Nadab and Abihu, but it is full of number and order. The passage is much too long for us to give a complete description of the gold and the silver, the scarlet and the acacia wood, or even the lampstand and the turban and the ephod, but the

reader's head should be full of all these splendors when he thinks about the things that we must now discuss.

Chapter Twenty-Eight is a wonderful presentation of all the pomp and grandeur proper to the office of the High Priest.

Exo. 28:11ff. "As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel; you shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree And you shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row; and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond And you shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. It shall have in it an opening for the head, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a garment, that it may not be torn. On its skirts you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet stuff, around its skirts, with bells of gold between them, a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, round about on the skirts of the robe And you shall weave the coat in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a girdle embroidered with needlework"

In the middle of all this pageantry, however, we are told of Aaron's more serious purpose.

Exo. 28:35ff. "And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, lest he die. And you shall make a plate of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the Lord.' And you shall fasten it on the turban by a lace of blue; it shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be upon Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall BEAR THE PERVERSION OF THE HOLY THINGS which the people of Israel hallow as their holy gifts; it shall always be upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord."

We read it, but we do not yet understand.

The rest of the chapter seems to go well, but again the end gives us pause

Exo. 28:41 "And you shall put them upon Aaron your brother, and upon his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. And you shall make for them linen breeches to cover their naked flesh; from the loins to the thighs they shall reach; and they shall be upon Aaron, and upon his sons, when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place; lest they BEAR PERVERSION AND DIE. This shall be a perpetual statute for him and for his descendants after him."

Chapter Twenty-Nine deals with the installation of Aaron, and the next chapter describes the perfume that makes all things smell sweet. Then comes the appointment of Bezalel, but it will make things clearer if we put that discussion off for a bit.

When Moses came down from the mountain, God gave him a written form of this law, which is again specifically referred to as the Tablets of Stone.

Exo. 31:18 Tablets of Stone, written with the finger of God.

Meanwhile, the people, despairing of Moses' return, asked Aaron to make them a god. Aaron collected all their rings of gold, fashioned them into a calf, and said

Exo. 32:4ff. "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord."

God, showing Himself angry to Moses, threatened to consume them all, and to start anew. He said to Moses, as He had once said to Abram, "I will make you a great nation." Moses' answer was a slow, reasonable defense. God had made a promise to the fathers, and if He were to break that promise, no nation in the world could ever trust Him again.

Exo. 32:9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation." But Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people, whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever.'" And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.

But perhaps it was all just a test, and if it was a test, what was God testing Moses about? God had, in fact, offered Moses the chance to supplant his father Abraham, as Oedipus had once done to his father. If the point of the test was to let Moses see for himself that he was capable of rejecting the chance of supplanting his father in order to save his people, he had done well.

But if it was a test of his sobriety and understanding, he had passed in speech, only to fail in action. When he faced the actual situation of the moment, everything had changed:

Exo. 32:19 And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Let us look more closely at what Moses actually did in verse 32:19. He broke the tablet—not the book, but the tablet. This is, presumably, the Tablet of Stone which God had promised to give Moses in Exodus 24:12 and which He had actually given him in Exodus 31:18 and which were still in his hand in Exodus 32:15.

This means that according to the Book of Exodus the tablet Moses broke the day he came down from the mountain did not contain what we today, and for many days gone past, have called the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:2–17. Rather, it was the laws of the tabernacle, Exodus 25:1–31:18.

Moses had seen through God's trick. The tabernacle was nothing more than a glorified and placating substitution for the golden calf, and he would have none of it. Even the altar still had horns on it. But Aaron was a different sort of a man. In his own bumbling way, he had seen that room had to be made for the irrational side of the human soul, perhaps a side he had already seen come out in his own sons Nadab and Abihu; "This is the God, O Israel, that brought us out of the Land of Egypt." What he did not see is that wildness could only be tamed by the precision of number and the intricacy of art.

Moses' irrational reaction to the irrational meant that while he was the best of lawgivers, only Aaron could take onto himself the more dangerous position of High Priest.

In the discussion of Cain, we saw that the rise of the arts was the final outgrowth of his act of perversion. Later, poor, simple Noah accidentally acquired a taste for the arts, and he, too, ended up as a farmer, a drunken farmer. This led to that night on which Ham saw his antediluvian origins, and the sight so fascinated him that he could never come to trust the new covenant. That was why one of his sons built a tower, and what explains the line

Gen. 15:16 The perversion of the Amorites is not yet complete.

But all that was different now. The perverse had to become transformed into the holy so that wildness could be contained by order and by number. In order to meet the problem, Bezalel was appointed, and God gave the arts.

Exo. 31:3–4 "And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze. . . ."

Now we can begin to understand why the danger of death always lurks within the walls of the Holy Tabernacle.

Moses saw that the new was so close to the old that it would not have a chance unless the old was firmly put out of the way.

Exo. 32:25ff. And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Put every man his sword on his side, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'"

In this way, the sons of Levi became the Levites, and we remember Hamor, zeal purified.

Moses knew that he did not fully understand these changes and said,

Exo. 33:16 "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all the other people that are upon the face of the earth?" And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory."

Moses had a good bit to learn that day. He learned that God was merciful, slow to anger, and many other things, but the first thing he had to learn was to accept the Tablets of Stone.

Exo. 34:1–7 Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first; and I will write upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let no flocks or herds feed before that mountain." So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth, keeping steadfast love for thousands, bearing perversion and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the perversion of the fathers upon the son and the son's son, to the third and the fourth [generation]."

In the remainder of the book, Moses demonstrates in act that he has accepted the Tablets of Stone by instituting them word for word, and Aaron, maker of the Golden Calf, emerges as High Priest.

We cannot spend as much time on the Book of Leviticus, but Chapter Ten lies directly in our path.

Lev. 10:1–4 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord has said, ‘I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be honored.’” And Aaron held his peace.

Now we can all see what God had seen all too clearly back when Moses made the uncommanded sacrifice. The vision of the “pavement of sapphire” was too wild, and it was not the right time to “behold God, and eat and drink.” It was that act which caused God to call Moses back up to the mountain to give him the Tablets of Stone. Moses had performed a sacrifice with “the young lads from among the children of Israel” at a time when there were no proper priests, and now Aaron’s sons are dead; but a promise is a promise, “And Aaron held his peace.”

The rest of the chapter reads as follows:

Lev. 10:4–20 And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, “Draw near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp.” So they drew near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, “Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not rend your clothes, lest you die, and lest wrath come upon all the congregation; but your brethren, the whole house of Israel, may bewail the burning which the Lord has kindled. And do not go out from the door of the tent of meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you.” And they did according to the word of Moses.

And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, “Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses.

And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left, “Take the cereal offering that remains of the offerings by fire to the Lord, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy; eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons’ due, from the offerings by fire to the Lord; for so I am commanded. But the breast that is waved and the thigh that is

offered you shall eat in any clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they are given as your due and your sons' due, from the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the people of Israel. The thigh that is offered and the breast that is waved they shall bring with the offerings by fire of the fat, to wave for a wave offering before the Lord, and it shall be yours, and your sons' with you, as a due for ever; as the Lord has commanded."

Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold, it was burned! And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron who were left, saying, "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the perversion of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord? Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." And Aaron said to Moses, "Behold, today they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord; and yet such things as these have befallen me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been acceptable in the sight of the Lord?" And when Moses heard that, he was content.

Moses disassociated Aaron and his living sons from the dead and from the mourning world around them and inquired of their well-being. Only then did he diligently inquire about the goat of the sin offering. He was angry and spoke to Eleazar and Ithamar, but Aaron knew that the question was addressed to him. Moses was worried that fear might have taken hold of Aaron, and that he might be unwilling to "eat the sin offering" and so to "bear the perversion" of the people. Aaron calmly said that because of what had happened it was not a good day to eat the sin offering, and this time it was Moses who "was content."

Thus, to treat any sacrifice as if it were profane is a perversion.

Lev. 7:18 If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him; it shall be an abomination, and he who eats of it shall bear his perversion.

There is one more tale from the Book of Leviticus to be told. Chapter Sixteen, six full chapters after the one we have been discussing begins:

Lev. 16:1 The Lord spoke to Moses, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died.

This is one of the ways the author has of indicating a relationship between two apparently unrelated accounts.

This account begins by again warning Aaron of the dangers of the priesthood, of his need of the linen breeches and the girdle, and of the turban. Aaron is to sacrifice a bull for himself.

Lev. 16:7 “Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the Lord at the door of the tent of meeting; and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.”

After much preparation, we read

Lev. 16:20ff. “And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the perversions of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their perversions upon him to a cut-off land; and he shall let the goat go into the wilderness.”

Which goat goes out alone into the cut-off world is just a matter of chance.

The central teaching of the Torah concerning the Levites and hence concerning the problem of perversion is presented near the beginning of Book of Numbers:

3:12–13 Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the first-born are mine; on the day that I slew all the first-born of the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the first-born in Israel, both of men and of beasts, they shall be mine. I am the Lord.

We have already seen a similar passage in Exodus:

Exo. 13:11f. And when in time to come your son asks you, “What does this mean?” you shall say to him, “By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb; but all the first-born of my sons I redeem.”

But now the Levites have been substituted for Israel, and soon it will be only Aaron.

Let us try to understand the passage from Numbers by going through it quite slowly. First of all, the word I have translated “first-born” literally means “the chosen,” but in common parlance the word does imply the first-born. “The chosen of the field” simply means the first fruits, not necessarily the best fruits. But among men, there is always a struggle between the two meanings.

In what sense can Levi be understood to be the first-born? In fact, Reuben was the first-born, the chosen one.

Gen. 29:32 And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben.

Reuben had just been called “the chosen one”: “the people of Reuben, Israel’s first-born.” And even well after the present passage, Reuben will continue to be called “the chosen one”:

Num. 26:5 Reuben, the first-born of Israel; the sons of Reuben: of Hanoch, the family of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the family of the Palluites;

Reuben himself was, one might say, a jolly bumbler. He was the boy that found the mandrake—I suppose while playing in the fields—and gave it to his mother (Genesis 30:4). But when Rachel died, and his father was out of town, he slept with Rachel’s handmaid Bilhah. I suppose he thought that his father’s connection to Bilhah had been severed and Bilhah was his inheritance. He was, as I say, incompetent and did not understand such things.

Of the sons, he was the first to try to rescue Joseph. He planned to have the brothers throw him in a pit, intending to return later and take the boy home.

Gen. 37:19–22 And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.

However, as his much wiser brother Judah saw, the plan would not have worked. The boys were too angry, and they would have found another occasion. Judah’s plan of getting the boy out of the country was much wiser. When Reuben later returned to the pit and saw that it was empty, he thought the boy was dead and rent his clothes. Apparently, he never knew of Judah’s alternative plan.

When the brothers were standing before Joseph in fear, he was the first to remember what had happened to Joseph and to feel the guilt.

Gen. 42:22 And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the lad? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."

When he returned to Canaan, and the sons were trying to persuade Jacob to let them take the young boy Benjamin with them back to Egypt, it was Reuben who said,

Gen. 42:37 Slay my two sons if I do not bring him back to you.

Of course, that would be the very last thing that Jacob would have wanted. But, as we said before, Reuben was a decent fellow, but quite a bumbler, and Isaac, so far as I know, was the only man chosen because he was a bumbler.

That leaves Simon. Now Simon and Levi were always treated as a pair. They were the two who attacked the men of Shechem after the affair with Dinah. It's a rather troubling account. After a manner of speaking, the men of Shechem had become their brothers.

When Hamor first described the union of the two houses to his own people the situation seemed ideal.

Gen. 34:20ff. So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, "These men are friendly with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters. Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised."

Yet, when he added the words

Gen. 34:23 "Will not their cattle, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us."

Hamor made it clear that any such union would have effectively prevented the establishment of the just and holy nation which God had planned. Were the brothers then defending a sister and a great promise, or were they just a pair of fratricides? It's hard to say.

Jacob's prognostication is somewhat strange.

Gen. 49:5ff. Simon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

When Jacob calls them “brothers,” he clearly has in mind their rashness and the grave injustices which that led to after the marriage of Dinah in Chapter Thirty-five. And indeed, his prediction was realized, but in two very different ways.

The Sons of Levi became the priests. But since they were distributed throughout the land, they received no territories of their own.

Num. 18:20 And the Lord said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.”

Simon’s fate, on the other hand, was total obscurity. No men of importance came from the tribe of Simon, and most of the men of that tribe settled within the borders of Judah. Of the sixteen cities which were granted to Simon in the Book of Joshua, all but five of were also listed among the cities granted to the tribe of Judah (compare Joshua 19:1–9 with Joshua 15:20–62).

Before the settlement of the land, Simon numbered 59,300, more than any tribe with exceptions of Judah and Dan. At the end of the book, that number had fallen to 22,200, less than any other tribe. By the end of the Book of Deuteronomy the tribe appears to have no independent existence whatsoever, and hence it is the only tribe which does not even receive a blessing from Moses just before his death (Deuteronomy 33).

Although it had been nearly the most numerous tribe when the people left Egypt, by the time they reached the promised land, the tribe of Simon had been completely absorbed by Judah and ceased to exist as an independent tribe.

Thus, each in its own way was “divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel.”

Simon and Levi remind one so much of the two goats. A lot was drawn; one went to God, and the other to Azazel, as if it didn’t matter much which was which. The glory and the heinous character of their act left no other division possible.

It should also be noted that when Joseph chose a hostage at random, the lot again fell upon Simon.

Now let us look more closely at the terms of this debt.

Num. 3:12–13 Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the first-born are mine; on the day that I slew all the first-born of the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the first-born in Israel, both of men and of beasts, they shall be mine. I am the Lord.

First, it must be noted that Israel itself neither incurred the debt, nor was it incurred at their direct request. Rather, it was incurred by the Lord on their behalf. “. . . I slew. . . .” But the debt was there, in front of them, nonetheless.

Now let us look at the conditions under which the debt was incurred:

Insofar as the people had a request, it was:

Exo. 2:23–25 In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

It would be hard to think of a more just or more reasonable request. The Lord began His reply by saying:

Exo. 3:7–9 I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

But His final words are:

Exo. 4:21–23 When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. And you shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me”; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.

The conclusion seem to be that for the Bible, man is responsible for the ill effects of the conditions of his own existence, even though he may have in no way participated in their coming to be.

There were many other stories of Aaron which we do not have time to tell. His acts with the fire pans the reader might want to put together for himself. The two tales that one must remember are the time the heads of the families each brought a rod to plant and Aaron's became a tree. That, too, is part of Aaron's story: the way he could make art appear to be nature. Then, too, there was the time of the plague, when Aaron, though not Moses, could run into their midst and quell it.

Now we must go to the desert of Zin.

It was exactly like the beginning all over again: almost as if they hadn't moved. Then it was the desert of Sin, and this time it was the desert of Zin. But the story was the same. The people revolted for lack of water. Not much had changed in all these years. Last time God had said:

Exo. 17:6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, that the people may drink.

“Strike!” second person, imperative, singular, “Strike!”

God again told Moses to take up the rod, but this time, he said:

Num. 20:8ff. Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and *speak* to the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them; so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand and *struck* the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle.

“Speak”: second person, imperative, plural; “Struck”: third person, indicative, singular.

The people had their water that day, but the Lord said to Moses and Aaron:

Num. 20:12 Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.

“You shall not bring”: second person, future, plural. Aaron will die for what Moses had done.

We can finally understand the full meaning of the end of Moses’ first conversation with God. Moses had said, “I am not a man of speech,” and this is what he meant. Like Billy Budd, Moses in anger lost the power of speech. It was that same old anger of his that had once caused him to smash the Tablets of Stone, and now it had caused him to strike the rock. That was why God angrily threw Aaron at him. “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite?”

They, too, were brothers, like the first pair, and again one will die because of the action of the other. But now things have changed. Moses, Aaron, and Eleazar went up to the top of Mount Horeb

Num. 20:28 And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.

And thus Aaron bore the perversion of the children of Israel. I’ve never been sure how Aaron died. I only know that his son Eleazar became High Priest, but whenever difficulties and bloodshed arose, he was silently replaced by his son Phineas.

If there is a perversion lying behind civilization it does not mean that one may escape by returning to the prepolitical:

Lev. 17:16 If he [one who eats what dies of itself or is torn by beasts] does not wash them [his clothes] and bathe his flesh, he shall bear his perversion.

It is also for Israel to know that if perversion is not “faced” and dealt with, it can kill a nation. It has done so once:

Lev. 18:25 The land became defiled and so I punished its perversions.

and that it can do so again:

Lev. 26:38f. You will be lost among the nations and the land of your enemies shall devour [eat] you. Whoever among you is left will rot away on account of their perversion in the land of their enemies. Yea, on account of the perversion of their fathers they shall rot away along with them. But if they confess their perversion . . . I will remember . . .

Only two quotations from our list remain, and the reader may read them as seems best.

Num. 15:31 If a soul raises his hand [and murders] . . . his perversion is upon him.

Deu. 19:15 A single witness shall not raise up against any man for any perversion or any sin

The question must still remain open as to whether the author of Job was aware of this tradition. However one reads it, Job says in 10:4–6, “Have You eyes of flesh? Can You see as men see?” “Can time mean to You what time means to mortal man? Do Your years pass by as our years, that You probe back into my perversions and track down my sin?”

4. For Zophar, the incommensurability which has been perplexing Job finds its origins in the fact that the workings out of human justice take place in a realm far beyond its own ken. No view except God’s view is large enough to make sense of itself.

5. The problem, according to Zophar, is not merely one of having a large enough horizon. It is the myriad of little separate worlds, each of which might suddenly come into contact with any other, or claim a being apart from any other. No world can perceive its effect on any other world until God brings them together, and then it is too late.

6. This incommensurability is only apparent and is due to the limited character of man’s superficial view of his own world. But if man were to clean his

own heart of all injustice, and trust in God, all would be well, and man would emerge as the center of all that is visible.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1 Then Job answered and said: **2** “You are, indeed of the people and with you learning will die, **3** but like you, I too have some understanding which does not fall short of yours.¹ Who is not capable of such things? **4** But now I have become a joke² to my friends, one who would ‘Call on God and have him answer’—a joke, a simple, innocent joke! **5** For those who can think at their ease there is always scorn for calamity. But it’s out there waiting for anyone whose foot happens to slip.³ **6** Oh, there is peace enough in the tents of robbers and security for those who enrage God,⁴ which God Himself has placed in their hand.

7 Just ask the beasts and they will show you; or the birds in the sky, they can tell you, **8** or have a chat with the earth and it will teach you. Even the fish in the sea can relate the tale for you. **9** Who among all these does not know that it was the hand of God that has done all this?⁵

10 In his hand is the soul⁶ of every living thing and the breath of each bodily man. **11** Does not the ear try words as the palate tastes food? **12** Is wisdom with the old or does length of days make for understanding?

13 With Him are wisdom and valor. His are counsel and understanding, **14** and what He tears down can never be rebuilt. He closes in on a man and nothing is ever reopened. **15** He restrains the waters and all is parched. He sends them out again and the land is overturned. **16** With Him are strength and soundness. Both the one who errs⁸ and the one who causes the error are His. **17** He makes counselors to go about ravaged; and judges He drives into madness. **18** He undoes the belt of kings and binds a strip about their loins.⁹

19 He makes priests to go about ravaged; and subverts the mighty. **20** He obliterates the speech of the trustworthy and takes taste from the elders. **21** He pours out disgrace upon noble men and looses the girdle of the well armed. **22** He unveils deep things from out of the darkness; He leads the Shadow of Death out into the light.¹⁰ **23** He makes nations great and then He destroys¹¹ them. He expands nations and there He leaves them. **24** He obliterates the heart from the heads of the peoples of the earth. He makes them wander through chaos with no path. **25** They grope in the darkness without a light. He makes them wander like a drunken man.¹²

Comments

1. They live in a world which they share with a whole people, while Job is alone in his. Perhaps they understand that world as well as any that live in it, yet each world is only one and all must be heard.

2. “a laugh”

3. While Job has a certain kind of respect for Zophar’s wisdom of the ages, that which comes only with time, reflection, and belief, he cannot totally ignore the surface of things, the immediate look of things as it reveals itself to anyone who is immediately involved. But the surface is all too easily forgotten, and its uncomfortable remnants can be escaped by turning them into a joke. At this point in his thought, this notion of immediate involvement is of prime importance for Job. Without it things are merely the way they are said to be.

4. The meaning of the text is obscure.

5. For Job, this is the unintended irony lying behind the great Psalms like Nineteen, “The heavens are telling the glory of God.”

6. The word can mean “breath,” “wind,” or “spirit.”

7. Although the Book of Job is wrapped around the contention between “hearing” and “seeing” for the true image of “knowledge,” the imagery of “taste” and of the “palate” is of some help in our attempt to understand what Job means by knowing. The subject first came up in:

Job 6:6 Can what is tasteless be eaten without salt or does the slime of an egg white have any taste? My soul refuses to touch them. They are like a contagion in my daily bread.

Taste is what makes knowledge worth while. The taste of a world is what makes that world livable. Unlike seeing, taste includes the most important aspects of an object, its beauties and its uglinesses. Knowledge is not a passive act. It presents itself to us in such a way that we cannot but react. At this stage, to know is not to comprehend the whole as an object outside of the knower, but to ingest a part of the object, either to make it part of oneself, or to spit it out.

Job constantly plays with the fact that the palate is an organ of both understanding and speech, as if the knowing coming in and the speech going out were the same thing.

Job 12:20 He obliterates the speech of the trustworthy and takes taste from the elders.

Job 6:30 There is no injustice on my tongue, and yet does not my palate know the taste of ruination.

At a certain point in the text, Job says:

Job 29:10. The voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue cleaved to their palate, 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.

But later, Elihu says:

Job 33:2 Behold, I open my lips, and the tongue in my palate begins to speak.

From these two statements, it's hard to know exactly what is meant by the word "palate." The least one can say is that it is an organ of taste and of speech: that it is not the tongue itself, but something which, in some way or another, can contain the tongue.

When Job says:

Job 31–30 Could I have rejoiced when hardship struck at those that hate me or come to life because evil had found them, without giving my palate over to sin by asking for his life with a curse.

he means that his speech is not merely on the tip of his tongue, as we sometimes say, but comes from within and hence implies room inside, out of which the speech came, a world if you like. He means that speech is necessarily accompanied by pleasure or pain, anger or delight. He would have tasted the sinfulness in his curse as he spoke it. This adds to the notion that for the moment at least, there is, for Job, an immediate interrelationship bordering on unity of an object, awareness of it, human speech concerning it, and human reaction to it.

He means that speech can only be feeling because it is speech about a world.

8. The word used implies a wrong done inadvertently.

9. The kaleidoscopic melange of order and disarray which Job sees in the world about him is wonderfully captured by language of the text. The word for "belt" is the same as the word which we have been translating as "discipline." Further, the word for "bind" also comes from that same root, as if to say: "He undoes the discipline of kings and disciplines them by a discipline about their loins." In other words, civil discipline has been forcibly replaced by a loincloth. The effect is enhanced in Hebrew by the fact that the word for "strip" also sounds as if it came from the same root: "He undoes the discipline of kings and disciplines them by a discipline about their loins."

10.

Job 10:21f. Well, I will be going soon, going to a land of darkness and shadowy death and I will not return; to a land whose light is darkness, shadowy death and without order—A land whose light is darkness."

At this point, for Job, the taunting chaos we see is only a reminder of a true underlying chaos which we do not see.

11. causes them to perish

12. The surface world, to which Job has committed himself to taking seriously, is a crazy contradictory world, full of wisdom, valor, and madness; full of roads to glory that lead nowhere. But for Job, it's all God's world and it is through that world that we know Him. The world is too orderly, too revelatory, to be a chaos, and yet that is where it always finds itself.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1 “All this my eye has seen; my ear has heard and understood. **2** Whatever you know, I know, nor do I fall short of you. **3** I would speak with the Almighty! I wish to argue with God. **4** But you are a bunch of worthless doctors who plaster with lies. **5** Who can move you to silence? It would be wisdom on your part. **6** Hear my argument; listen to my quarrel.

7 Would you speak unjustly for God’s sake? For His sake would you speak words of treachery? **8** Would you show Him favor or argue His case for him. **9** Will that be your ace in the hole when He comes to examine you? Do you think you can deceive Him as you can deceive a mortal? **10** Certainly He Himself would argue against you if you were to show Him even a hidden favor, **11** will His preference not be to terrify and to let His fear fall upon you? **12** Your aphorisms are proverbs of ash, your bulwarks, bulwarks of clay.¹

13 Be silent now for my sake. I will speak, let come upon me what may.¹⁴ For what reason do I take my flesh between my teeth and my life in my hands? **15** It may be that He will slay me. I have no higher expectations.² None the less I will defend my ways before Him. **16** That too has become for me salvation, for the impious do not approach Him.³

17 Listen, listen to my words. With your ears attend to my declaration. **18** I have laid out my case and I know I shall be vindicated. **19** Who is he that would contend with me? Now, as things are I can only remain silent and perish. **20** But do two things for me and I shall no longer be hid from your face. **21** Remove Your hand from me, and let not Your terror frighten me. **22** Then summon me up and I will reply, or let me speak and You shall give answer.

23 How many are my perversions and my sins? Let me know my transgression and my vices.⁴ **24** Why do You hide your face from me and think of me as Your enemy? **25** Would You terrorize me like a driven leaf? or put me to flight like a piece of dry straw, **26** that You write bitter things against me and bring up the perversions of my youth?⁵ **27** You put my feet in the stocks. You scrutinize my every wandering. You circumscribe the foundation under my feet, **28** and all becomes worn out like a rotten thing—like a piece of clothing that the moths have eaten.⁶

Comments

1. Job begins this part of his argument with the assertion that he has heard and fully understood the tradition. The implication here is that the tradition as such is not capable of defending itself. This leads to a new turn of things when he says; “I would speak with the Almighty! I wish to argue with God.”

To uphold the tradition by denying the surface, or as Job thinks of it, by plastering over its wounds with lies, that is, by calling things just when they

seem not to be just, is ultimately destructive of the tradition itself. The true foundation of the tradition must ultimately lie at ease with the surface, and any foundation which must smooth over the surface and, by implication, cannot meet it on its own terms, is a “bulwark of clay.”

2. This is the *ketir* (what is actually written). The *geri* (how the tradition says it is actually to be read) would give “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

3. Again, Job is playing with the psalmic litterateur. There is what must have been a well-known phrase:

My strength and the music of the Lord, and He has become for me salvation.

which occurs in Exodus 15:2, Isaiah 12:2, and Psalms 118:14. In Psalms 118:21 it is also mindful of the phrase

Thank thee that thou hast answered and thou hast become for me salvation.

Job, by the way, was not the only biblical character to play with the line. Joab once said to his brother Abishai:

If the Syrians are too strong for me, then thou shalt become for me salvation.

Job has been caught between the two worlds. The surface and human care for the surface have demanded what wisdom has forbidden. As in the case of Socrates, Job's courage has no existence in its own right, but is an integral part of his grasp of the importance of the question in front of him. Job must act in accordance with those human concerns, while feeling the full weight of wisdom's prohibition.

When quoting the phrase “[it/he] has become for me salvation,” he has added the critical words “That too,” as if to suggest that he may have glimpsed some new kind of salvation, though searching it out may be full of danger and require great courage. In light of the first verses of the chapter, we can see that Job, like Socrates, implicitly suggests a need to reconsider our notion of true piety. It may consist of our attempt to understand the words of the God, in Socrates' case, the Delphic Oracle, by taking them seriously, while facing the claims of the surface.

We must also remember that in verse 9, Job had implied that it was a lack of courage in Zophar that led him to his false piety.

4. At this point Job pauses half in expectation, but receiving no reply, he turns and goes on.

5. In this passage, Job, too, associates perversion with the long-distant past, but for him it is a long-distant dead past. This was not the first time. Back in Chapter Ten he had said:

Job 10:4 Have You eyes of flesh? Can You see as mortals see? Can time mean to You what time means to man? Do Your years pass by as our years, that You probe back into my perversions and track down my sin? Somewhere in Your mind I am not guilty, and yet there is none to save me from Your hand.

Not perversion but the charge of perversion is the true source of human suffering. Told in writings that he is heir to a long-forgotten perversion, man is denied a past on which to build a firm foundation. He becomes the piece of dry straw blowing in every wind.

Twice before Job had connected the question of perversion with the problem of being watched:

Job 7:18 Yes, and inspect him every morning and test him every minute. When will you let me be? You'll not even let me alone to swallow my own spit. Supposing I have sinned, what have I done to you, Oh Thou Great Watcher Of Man? Why have you set me on course against you so that I become a burden even to myself? Why can you not pardon my transgressions or forgive my perversions? For now I shall lie down in the dust. You will seek for me, but I am not.

And again in Chapter Ten.

Job 10:12ff. Your dealings with me were full of life and loving care. Your guardianship watched over my spirit. But You treasured all these things in Your heart. I know what You have in mind; if I sin You'll be watching and You'll not clear me from my perversion. Well if I have been guilty the grief is mine, but even when I am innocent I have been so sated with reproach that no feeling of honor is left in me and I see only my feebleness.

and will soon do so again:

Job 14:16 Then no longer would You keep track of my every step, or be on the watch for my sin. My transgression would be sealed up in a pouch and You would plaster over my perversions.

It is this sense of being watched, not because of anything he has done, but because of what he is, because of his inherited perversion, that has reduced Job to nonbeing.

People do indeed suffer for the actions of past generations, but to regard that as some form of poetic or even divine justice rather than a horrible necessity is to undermine that sense of honor required to right the effects of those ancient actions.

6. Here we get a closer look at Job's first view of the clash. He can lay out his case and it can be made solid. He can demand to know the exact nature of

the charges laid up against him and their precise number. Such is the nature of all the evidence, but it is not clear that there is any way of presenting such evidence in the other court. Like Socrates, Job can only speak or reply by means of human speech, but unless room can be left for it, nothing that Job has, or sees, or knows will be worth the piece of clothing that the moths have eaten. Cf. note to 7:21.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1 Man (*'adam*) is born of woman, short-lived and full of rage. **2** He sprouts up as a fresh bud and withers. He flits by as a shadow and cannot endure. **3** Can You open Your eyes even to one such as that, and still come along with him¹ to proceedings raised against You?² **4** Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Not one!³ **5** His time is fixed. You keep the number of his months. You have set him limits which he cannot overstep. **6** Then turn Your gaze from him and let him be, so long as his days as a hireling are acceptable.⁴

7 For a tree there is hope. If it is cut down, it renews itself and its sprouting never wanes. **8** When its roots become old in the land and its stump is left in the dust to die, **9** then at the scent of water it bursts into bloom and sends out branches like a young sapling. **10** But when a man (*gebher*) dies, he perishes and is no more. A man (*'adam*) expires, and where is he? **11** The waters are gone from the sea. The river becomes a wasteland and is dried up. **12** A man lies down and rises not. Till the heavens are no more they shall not wake nor be roused from their slumber.⁵

13 Who can move You to hide me in the Pit and conceal me till your anger passes? Set me a fixed limit and remember me. **14** If a man (*gebher*) dies, will he come back to life again? All the days of my service I have waited in expectation for my release to come. **15** You would call. I would answer and You would have love for the work of Your hands.⁶ **16** Then no longer would You keep track of my every step, or be on the watch for my sin. **17** My transgression would be sealed up in a pouch and You would plaster over my perversions.⁷

18 A mountain has fallen and crumbled away, a rock dislodged from its place.⁸ **19** The waters have worn the stones away and its torrents have washed away the dust of the land. So, You have trashed⁹ all mortal hope. **20** You have overpowered man, and he has resigned. You mangled his face and sent him off. **21** His sons were honored but he never knew of it. They were in disgrace, but he was unaware.¹⁰ **22** His body surrounds him with pain, and his spirit is eaten away.

Comments

1. Note the change to the third person. Job will defend not himself simply, but mankind in his own person.

2. Man is not the best of all conceivable creatures. He is, in fact, “born of woman, short-lived and full of rage,” yet that is the man whom Job has chosen to defend. Is God willing to judge mankind in terms of the highest goals of which they are capable, or will He insist upon the highest simply? It is one thing to strive toward impossible goals from within, but to feel constantly judged by them from without, and so to ever be made to feel wanting is, for Job, to render all those strivings meaningless.

3. Justice must expect from each thing the highest possible; to demand more of a man, or of a tree, would be unjust. One wonders if these thoughts that Job is thinking at this juncture might not be part of what led men to the concept of nature in its classical sense.

4. If man’s nature is limited, a way must be found for him to be.

5. The compelling mood of this passage lies in the capacity of a man with thoughts so laden with death to give such full articulation to a world bursting with life.

6. Thoughts of the slumber of death have tired Job, and now he is slowly drifting off into a wonderful daydream in which the two worlds begin to blur over and merge into a single world. All the contradictions are gone. There is calling and answering. The hands that made Job no longer devour him, but love him. It is a wide world full of room for man and for God.

7. Job’s daydream culminates with an end to the watching and the cessation of all charges of perversion.

8. Job suddenly wakes, and the din of the clashing worlds has been magnified a thousandfold, and the surface world has been washed away. There is nothing left but the pain of the lost dream.

9. caused to perish

10. This verse seems rather critical, though I have not been able to understand it as I should wish. The best I can do is to point out that when Job suddenly wakes from his dream and finds himself back in the clashing worlds, feeling gruffly awakened by his fall from the dream, his first thoughts concern not the problem of perversion, but its inverse. The problem has shifted from an overburdensome awareness of the acts of the father on the part of the son, to an agonizing lack of awareness of the acts of the son on the part of the father, but I have not been able to see the implications of the shift.

The Book of Job

Translation and Commentary on Chapters 15–29

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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 moist 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-

12 • Interpretation

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

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 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

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?" 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 cruets 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.

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

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

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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.

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- 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 churning 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

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.

The Book of Job

Translation and Commentary on Chapters 30 and 31

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CHAPTER THIRTY

1 But now they have turned me into the joke¹, those younger than I whose fathers I would have felt contempt to put with my sheep dogs. **2** What is the strength of their hands to me, those men from whom all vigor has been lost, **3** a wasteland in want and starvation. They gnaw at a parched land and destroy as they are destroyed. **4** They gather mallow and leaves from the bushes. Broom root has become their food. **5** Driven from the heart of things, they are cried upon like thieves. **6** They find their quarter in river beds, in holes in the dust and the rock. **7** Braying in the bushes, they huddle together under a weed. **8** Sons of Fools and Sons of Nobodies! They have been whipped from the land.²

9 And now they have made a ditty of me and I have become a byword to them. **10** Oh, how they abhor me and keep their distance; they do not even refrain from spitting in my face. **11** They unfasten my tent rope and down I come. They have thrown off all restraint. **12** On my right, flowering youths rise up and put me to flight. They pave roads of destruction against me. **13** They tear up my path and foster my demise but it does them no good.

14 They come in a great burst, wave after wave of destruction.³

15 Terror turns upon me; it pursues my gentility⁴ like the wind,⁵ and my salvation passes by like a cloud. **16** Now, my soul has poured itself out, and days of misery have taken hold of me. **17** By night my bones are whittled away, and the gnawing never ceases.⁶ **18** My clothing envelops me in great restraint and the collar of my tunic chokes at me. **19** It throws me into the mire and I become like dust and ashes.

20 I cry out to You, but You give no answer. I stand there, but you only stare at me. **21** You have turned brutal⁸ and with the might of Your hand You persecute me. **22** You hoist me up onto the wind⁹ and set me astride to be tossed about in the wreckage. **23** I know that You will deliver me to death, the house prepared for all that lives; **24** yet will not those in turmoil reach out their hand and cry out in their calamity.¹⁰

The first twenty-nine chapters of the translation and commentary appeared in Volume 24, Numbers 2 and 3, and Volume 25, Number 1, of *Interpretation*. The balance will appear in future issues.

25 Did I not weep for those who had seen hard times? My soul grieved for the poor. 26 I hoped for the good but there came evil; I waited in expectation for the light, but there came only a murk. 27 My bowels churned, never at rest. Days of poverty were ever before me. 28 I walked in gloom with no sun above. I stood up in the assembly and cried out; 29 and so I became a brother to the Jackal¹¹ and friend to the ostrich.¹² 30 My skin turned black and is now peeling off me; my bones are scorched by the heat. 31 My lyre has turned to mourning and my flute to the voice of tears.

Comments

1. Verse 1 is intended as a reference back to verse 24 of the last chapter. Job's friendly laughter, intended to relieve others of the burden of that crippling kind of gratitude which leaves them with only a feeling of debilitating dependence, has been answered by a derisive laughter.

2. In turning laughter into scorn, they have, in Job's eyes, lost all humanity without gaining true animality. Their needs remain human, but the contempt implied by their jest makes it impossible for them to join with others except in the most direct sense of huddling together under a weed, sharing only their inability to share. They are human without the means to be human.

3. Job finds that he is no longer able to maintain the fiction that these men are powerless and can do no harm. The mass effect of those who cannot see the surface has, for Job, overwhelmed the surface.

4. The place of laughter, joking, playing, of scoffing, and scorn, all the same word in the Hebrew text, has become confused for Job and intertwined with the problem of contempt and compassion. When his goodnatured jest which stemmed from his compassion became their gibes, their contempt for him became his contempt for them.

The confusion of his feelings of contempt and compassion then works upon his received notion of being watched to produce a deep sense of guilt which terrifies his inner sense of gentility.

5. or "spirit."

6. Verse 17 is to be taken in a completely literal way. It is not uncommon for people to be told by their dentist that their gums are in poor shape because they clench their teeth at night. It is hard to imagine how much pain we can both cause ourselves and withstand in sleep by twisting and turning, feeling without waking. But why should Job feel this guilt so deeply in his being and punish himself so harshly for a crime which he knows he did not commit? This is perhaps the most fundamental question raised by the book. It is a question that has been peering at us from behind every page, an enigma too vital to be evaded by speaking of "two Jobs" or of multiple authorship.

In facing this problem in a day when the works of Dr. Sigmund Freud have become so much a part of the air we breathe, I feel much like a five-year-old boy dressed in his Little Lord Fauntleroy suit, trudging home from the pond with a tiny sailboat under his arm. How shall he relate the great saga of his day's adventures at the dinner table when the list of guests includes such men as Mr. Darwin and Mr. Melville? Yet even in our little pond the question still looms at us large: Why should a man like Job feel the weight of guilt for a crime which he knows he did not commit, or feel that his soul has been perverted by an original and all-encompassing act of the fathers that for him has no such power over the human spirit?

As Eliphaz, and in fact as the whole of human society known to Job, sees it, Job is too perverted to recognize his own perversion with any clarity, and his view of the world is too narrow to see his own sin. He must learn to forgo the limited view of man and listen to the voice of God as it reveals itself to him in his own night visions. Job's nightly twistings and turnings are caused by his own guilt. Conscience is the means of divine retribution. But doubts have been raised concerning this way of looking at the world both in terms of itself and in terms of the injustice that it may be causing with regard to Job.

Is it then, that by considering himself guilty and by causing himself such pain in order to prove to himself the existence of his guilt, he can come to terms with other pains, ones which have no cause? Our guilt, confirmed to us by our own self-punishment, then becomes the reason for our otherwise reasonless pain.

Or does the feeling of guilt act as our only immediate guarantor of the cosmic significance of our actions?

Or do we, by condemning ourselves of sin, wish to place ourselves on a rank beyond ourselves by becoming the condemner as well as the condemned? If this is the case, what does it imply? Is it some strange kind of Kantian freedom that we feel, in that we, and no other, such as the deposed father, have become Lord and Master over ourselves? Or is it a way we have of silently and subliminally feeling the joys of tyranny, even at the expense of living our daily life under the pain and dread of that tyranny.

Compelling as these reasons are in general, they do not seem to be quite adequate in the case of Job. These arguments presuppose and gain their force from the cognitive power of human thought. They intend to give a thoughtful and reasoned account of the workings of the human psyche which touch the heart of the matter as it is apart from the needs and drives of the investigator himself. This may not, of course, always happen, but the science assumes that at least in theory it is possible. That would suggest that the human psyche can only be understood if it is fundamentally understood as something capable of understanding, and hence of misunderstanding itself.

Life would be so simple if the two, science and the all-too-human psyche, were so easily separable, but they are not. The Newtonian concept of inertia, a

once countertintuitive notion arrived at by much human labor, thought, and reflection, has by now become a mindless feeling that has worked its way down to the bottom of the gut. Galileo was almost killed for believing that the earth moved, and yet in not too long a time most people on the street believed it. It is, however, doubtful that many could articulate any reason for that belief. Surely they had nothing as cogent as those who had once said, "The sun moves, I see it rise every morning." Ghosts of thoughts that once lived in other minds haunt our every step.

One might argue that our Newtonian ghosts have not, and perhaps even cannot, bury themselves down deeply enough into our souls to live in the land where dreams are made. This is surely true, and yet they do seem to be on their way.

Perhaps the one thinker of the past who was most alive to the fact that any serious attempt to give an account of human thought must regard it as an activity which is capable of understanding itself, is Socrates.

Such questions lead one to remember his account of a discussion he once had with a man named Thrasymachus. Plato recounts the story in *The Republic*. Thrasymachus sees a world in which justice was the advantage of the stronger. Socrates begins by asking him whether if eating a great quantity of beef is to the advantage of Polydamas the pancratiast, does that mean that it is to the advantage of all of us to do so.

1. Justice is the advantage of the stronger
2. The stronger is Polydamas
 - A. Justice is the advantage of Polydamas
3. The advantage of Polydamas is eating a great quantity of beef
 - B. Justice is eating a great quantity of beef.

QED

The whole argument is very silly, not what Thrasymachus meant at all. Not one word is used in the right way, but it makes Thrasymachus a bit nervous all the same to see his words leading to a world larger than the one he focused on. What he meant, of course, is that justice is the advantage of the ruler and that all must follow his command. As it turns out, somewhere on the periphery of Thrasymachus's world is the notion that the stronger knows what is truly to his own advantage and what is not. Somehow he must have always known that, or his world would never have made any sense to him, but he cannot focus in on that notion without having to make a radical reinterpretation of his understanding of the world.

Once Thrasymachus is forced to consider the environment of his own thought, however, he embraces it with vigor, although Socrates gives him the opportunity of rejecting it.

"It doesn't make any difference, Polemarchus," I said, "if Thrasyarchus says it that way now, let's accept it from him. Now tell me, Thrasyarchus, was this what you wanted to say the just is, what *seems* to the stronger to be the advantage of the stronger, whether it is advantageous or not? Shall we assert that this is the way you mean it?"

"Not in the least," he said. "Do you suppose that I call a man who makes mistakes 'stronger' at the moment when he is making mistakes?"

"I did suppose you to mean this," I said, "when you agreed that the rulers are not infallible but also make mistakes in some things." (340 c)

This step is fatal to Thrasyarchus's argument, although it is hardly fatal to the man. It means that Thrasyarchus was forced to step outside his hero to see his wisdom rather than remain inside to feel his power. He does this partly because he has to make sure of his power in the future, but partly because he wants to be admired, and to be admired means to be admired from the outside. This means that he wants to be recognized as possessing an art. But when Socrates threatens to make Thrasyarchus step beyond his art as those who care for horses are judged by those who can tell whether a horse has been well cared for or not, Thrasyarchus turns on him:

"Tell me, Socrates, do you have a wet nurse?" "Why this?" I said. "Shouldn't you answer instead of asking such things?" "Because," he said, "you know she neglects your sniveling nose and doesn't give it the wiping you need, since it's her fault you do not even recognize sheep or shepherd." (343 a)

Shepherds, according to Thrasyarchus, only rule for the good of the sheep insofar as it makes them fatter and gives the shepherd more meat. Stepping outside in order to see what is best for the sheep themselves can at best only be ancillary. The only real question is, "What is best for the shepherd?" Thus Thrasyarchus has escaped Socrates but in so doing, he has failed to escape himself.

Near the end of their discussion, Thrasyarchus readily agrees to the statement:

"Let us say it, then, as follows," I said, "the just man does not try to better what is like but what is unlike, while the unjust man tries to better both like and unlike?" (349d)

For example, the musical man is able to best the unmusical man precisely by tuning his lyre in the same way that other musical men do. But for that same reason the musical man does not try to best another musical man, and the same is true of the wise and of the just. But unlike the artisans, the unjust man, who wishes to better, that is to better anybody or anything, can have no common goals outside himself in terms of which he could be praised. Thrasyarchus, who so wants to be seen and to be heard, has finally been pried out of himself

in order to see if he can be seen. He blushes and remains as silent as one who has been seen by a bear.

Socrates's goal, then, is not to defeat Thrasymachus or to prove that he was wrong. Perhaps that can't even be done. What he may have been able to do is to help him find those bits and byways on the periphery of his vision which might lead him beyond his own horizon.

The case of Meno, on the other hand, is a different matter. Meno has a teaching, or dogma, or one might even say, an ideology. It is only the dead remains of a thought which first grew up in an other mind, the mind of Gorgias. Since he merely inherited these thoughts, Meno is not in touch those vague and all but forgotten peripheral thoughts which dwell in the outer limits of Gorgias's horizon, and which underlie all that is at the focus of his attention. Only Gorgias himself can work his way back to those dim and smudged ideas which surround his thought and through which he must pass if he is to go beyond them. If he does not they will always be with him in their unarticulated character. Since our horizons are vague and shaggy, drifting off into a world beyond itself, only it can offer a means of escape. Meno, then cannot escape until he is willing to face his own horizon.

Modern science, however, in its search for rigor and exactitude demands a well-defined object.

Freud, of course, sees that there is no sharp distinction between the ego and the id, but in his attempt to emulate what is generally thought to be the way of modern science, he did not give sufficient heed to Plato's partly explicit, partly implicit claim that all meaningful human thought, including his own and hence Freud's as well, can only take place along that edge and in the gray where reason tries to make clearer to itself what it has already seen.

Man is both a social and a rational animal. The two are not identical. Job, so far as he knew, was the first man to feel the full implication of that distinction, and being the first, he met it unprepared while it was yet naked and unmediated by prior human thought.

We are born as social animals, weak, feeble, and in need of others. The everyday life of action requires well-defined horizons established either by the Fathers or divine revelation, or by those ghosts we call our common heritage. Without them there would be insufficient grounds for communal action or communal life. But reason does not believe in ghosts. It can only grasp them by bringing them back to life as a rethought thought. Sociality, on the other hand, knows only that it can only live by learning to live with the ghosts. Our lives depend upon it.

Well we remember Bildad's words:

8:8-10 Only ask of the first generation. Seat yourself firmly upon what their fathers had searched out; for we are only of a yesterday and know nothing, our days are but a shadow passing over the land. Will they not

teach you and speak to you as the words come tumbling out of their heart?

But is that “asking” the asking of piety and belief, or the asking of wonder and of doubt? For Bildad the answer is clear, and to do otherwise is not only to try to answer the riddle of the Sphinx, it is to threaten Laius as well.

Reason and dedication to the surface, then, demand the one thing forbidden by divine law, tradition, and sociality, that is, autonomous understanding.

Job is both a rational animal and a social animal, and he is both in the deepest sense. He therefore lives under two shaggy horizons. For each the other is and is not there. As we have seen, sociality can only articulate itself to itself as the forbiddener and hence, as the rewarder, or savior, and this is the form in which Job is aware of it. This act of self-forbidding of what the self wants most is that which is felt as guilt.

7. Greenberg translates: “With great effort I change my clothing: The neck of my tunic fits my waist.” The Revised Standard translates: “With violence it seizes my garment; it binds me about like the collar of my tunic,” but it gives as an alternative translation “My garment is disfigured.” Here the first problem is the meaning of the word *ithappas*. Its root means “to search.” In the reflexive, it means “to distort” or “to disguise oneself” by a change of clothing (Cf. I Sam. 28:8, 1 Kings 20:38, 22:30). That would account for Greenberg’s translation. In every case the emphasis is on the act of disguising, however, not on the change of clothing. It must also be pointed out that the verb is in the third not the first person. On the other hand, while the word *azar* does mean “to gird,” the emphasis seems to be on the strength rather than on the waist. I then take him to be saying the he feels his clothing pulling at him and distorting him. This means taking the word for “clothing” as the subject rather the object of the verb. Think only of Phaedra.

8. See notes to 30:29, 39:1, and 41:2.

9. or “spirit”

10. This is felt as the silent stare of self at self in which the division of self from self has itself become divided. Job the weak has become Job the forbiddener, dissociated from itself and from its sociality, while Job the autonomous has found that he could no longer be autonomous when cut off from his divided self.

11. The Hebrew (*tan*) has several meanings and each, as we shall see, constantly rings of the others. It can mean “sea monster” or the “Serpent” (some say “snake,” others say the “dragon”), or, as in our case, it can mean the “jackal.” To catch the ring of the way in which each always bears an echo of the other, think of the word “seahorse,” which, partly because it is a somewhat strange word, we cannot hear without vaguely thinking of the land horse, although in the case of the word *tan* the connection was probably as good but stronger.

Even when used with a singular verb, like the name of God, it normally appears with a plural ending, either the regular Hebrew ending (*tanim*), or the somewhat more foreign, and hence somewhat more mystical-sounding (*tanin*).

In the Biblical text, it is often connected with the Leviathan, and may have even been considered to be etymologically connected with it—*levi*, “to twist,” and *tan*.

We first meet the Tan in the book of Genesis as the great sea monster.

Gen. 1:21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds,

The next time we meet the *tan* it seems to be something more like a serpent:

Exod. 7:9ff. “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent (*tan*).’ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD commanded; Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent (*tan*). Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. For every man cast down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.”

It is not, however, the normal word for serpent (*nachash*) which had been used in an earlier passage:

Exod. 4:2 The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A rod.” And he said, “Cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent and Moses fled from it. But the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand, and take it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.

In fact, the word *tan* seems to be used to mean “serpent” in only one other verse in the Bible:

Ps. 91:13 You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent (*tan*) you will trample under foot. Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

In its role as the sea monster, it is closely related to the Leviathan,

Isa. 27:1 In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent (*nachash*), Leviathan the twisting serpent (*nachash*), and he will slay the monster (*tan*) that is in the sea.

and as we can see, the Biblical authors are again divided in their understanding of the ultimate standing of the *tan* of the sea, although the division is not as harsh as it was in the case of the Leviathan. See note to 3:8.

According to some accounts, the monster will one day be destroyed,

Ps. 74:13 Thou didst divide the sea by thy might; thou didst break the heads of the monster on the waters.

Isa. 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the monster? Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea, the waters of the great deep; that didst make the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?

whereas for others he will be tamed;

Ps. 148:6 And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed. Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps,

This time, however, there is no hint of playfulness or admiration.

Ezekiel gives two fuller descriptions of the beast which might be of some help to the reader:

Ezek. 29:2 Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; speak, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, 'My Nile is my own; I made it.' I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales; and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams, with all the fish of your streams which stick to your scales.

Ezek. 32:2 Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him: You consider yourself a lion among the nations, but you are like a monster in the seas; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their rivers. Thus says the Lord GOD: I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples; and I will haul you up in my dragnet. And I will cast you on the ground, on the open field I will fling you, and will cause all the birds of the air to settle on you, and I will gorge the beasts of the whole earth with you.

Here the *tan* appears as the great blue Egyptian hippopotamus-god, reported maker of the Nile which Pharaoh pretended to be, but in Ezekiel, he is revealed to be not the maker but the destroyer. This would explain why the serpent (*nachash*) that was destroyed in Exodus appeared to Pharaoh as a *tan*. It was himself.

Job's great complaint that man is ever watched rather than trusted, began in Chapter 7, verse 12 with the words: "Am I the sea or some monster (*tan*) that You set watch over me?" But now his awareness of being watched and the failure of his brothers to recognize his brotherhood have left him feeling strangely pulled by a sense of brotherhood with that same *tan*, but this time it has come in the form of the Jackal.

The jackal, the wild cousin of the domestic dog and constant companion to the ostrich, is pictured throughout the Bible as roaming through the land of desolation just beyond the world of man.

Neh. 2:1 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Jackal's Well and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which had been destroyed by fire.

Like Job, the *tan* live on the edge of the desolate city, in a wasteland devoid of human habitation:

Jer. 49:33 Hazor shall become a haunt of jackals, an everlasting waste; no man shall dwell there, no man shall sojourn in her.

Isa. 13:19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pride of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. It will never be inhabited or dwelt in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. But wild beasts will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there satyrs will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.

Job has acted as a man, and yet no man sees him as a man. Perhaps he has no choice now other than to abandon both society and his own sociality and meld into the world that knows no human eye or human tongue. For him it is a frightening thought, but the reader knows that it is into just such a world that the voice in the Tempest will soon beckon him.

12. "daughters of greed," is usually taken to refer to the ostrich, and there seems to be no reason to doubt that. It is not, however, the same as the word used in 39:13 for the ostrich from whom he will learn so much. There the author will use the word which comes from a root meaning "to shout for joy." This change may reflect a more fundamental transformation in Job's thoughts about the bird and about wild nature in general.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

1 I have made a covenant with my eyes, for how could I gaze upon a maiden? 2 What part have I in God above, or heritage from the Almighty on

high? **3** Is not calamity for the unjust and disaster only for those who work wickedness? **4** Does He not see my ways or take count of my every step?

5 Have I walked along with falsehood, or has my foot hurried to deceit? **6** Let Him weigh me on the scales of justice, and then God will know of my simplicity. **7** If my step has wandered from the way, my heart gone after my eyes, or a taint stuck to my hand, **8** then let me sow, but another eat, or let my crop be uprooted.²

9 If my heart was seduced by a woman and I set ambush at my neighbor's entrance way, **10** may my wife grind with another, and let others bow down over her, **11** because that would have been licentiousness and a juristic perversion.³ **12** It would be a fire consuming down to Abaddon,⁴ uprooting all that I have ever accomplished.

13 If ever I felt contempt for the cause of one of my servants, man or maid when they brought case against me, **14** what would I do when God rose up? How would I answer Him if He should call me into account? **15** Did not He who made me in my mother's belly make him as well? Did He not form us in the same womb?⁵

16 How could I withhold pleasures from the poor or drain a widow's eye, **17** or even eat a crust of bread alone, not sharing it with the fatherless, when they had grown up with me for a father? **18** From my mother's belly I was their mother's⁶ guide. **19** Whenever I saw a man who was lost, without clothing, nothing to cover his pitiful state, **20** damn if his loins didn't bless me because he (knew that he could always) warm himself with the shearing of my sheep.

21 If ever I brandished a hand against the fatherless because I saw help standing at the gate, **22** let my shoulder fall from its socket or my arm break at the joint, **23** because divine torment would fill me with fear and I could not bear its weight.

24 If ever I placed my confidence in gold, or called fine gold my security, **25** or rejoiced in the greatness of my wealth or the bounty found in my hand; **26** if ever I saw the radiance of the light, or the moon walking in splendor, **27** and with my heart secretly attracted, placed my fingers to my lips to kiss them, **28** that too would have been a juristic perversion for I would have forsaken God the most high.⁷

29 Could⁸ I have rejoiced when hardship struck at those that hate me or come to life because evil had found them, **30** without giving my palate over to sin by asking for his life with a curse. **31** Even the men of my own tent would have said; "Who will let us at his flesh? We will not be satisfied."⁹

32 I left no stranger sleeping out of doors but opened my doors to the traveler. **33** Would I have covered over my sins like (some) man ('adam) or concealed perversion in my bosom **34** through terror of the great multitude? or was I so shattered by family disgrace that I would stand petrified, not daring to go out the opening¹⁰ way?¹¹

35 Who will find someone to listen? Well, here is my writ: Let the Almighty answer, or let the man who has a quarrel against me write it down in a book.¹²
36 I'll hoist¹³ it up on my shoulders, or wear it round me like a crown. **37** But I will also give him an account of my every step and I will present it to him as a prince!¹⁴

38 But if my own land cries out against me, its furrows weeping together, and **39** claims that I have eaten its produce without payment and snuffed out the life of its owners, **40** then may thorns grow in that place for wheat and foul weeds for barley.¹⁵

THE WORDS OF JOB ARE TAM!¹⁶

Comments

1. *B^erit^h karat^hi*, literally, "I have cut a covenant." It is a much more formal and legalistic turn of phrase than Eliphaz uses in 5:22–23:

Have no FEAR of the beasts of the earth, for you have a covenant with the rocks in the field, and the beasts of the fields will bring you peace,

and can even be used to refer to the legal forms of a marriage. The verse holds within it the full tension and contradictory interweaving felt at the end of the last chapter between sociality and the need for autonomous understanding. As the tension in this verse implies, sexuality is claimed by both nature and by convention. What seems natural and direct for the one requires law and ceremony for the other. This inner conflict is felt as guilt.

Job, by the pre-eminently socio-political act of entering into a covenant, is cutting himself off from the most primal form of sociality. Human sexuality, in its ambiguities, is central, then, to all this disarray. In giving us a kind of immortality, it is another key to our autonomy, but in so doing, it reminds us of our lack of immortality, our weakness and need for others. It is, then, also key to our sociality. Again the two are linked, and in their opposition give rise to shame and guilt.

But how deep are such thoughts? How buried in our soul? What does the child know of death and mortality?

When his bottle drops to the floor, the child knows that what was is no more. If he cries, it sometimes returns, but sometimes it is broken and ugly, and sometimes it does not return at all. But how can he know that he too is a thing among things? Is he a thing that can be unthined like the bottle? How many of such thoughts are seeds that have become buried on the fringe of his horizon? When the bottle drops he is alone. Is this early feeling of loneliness what allows the notion of mortality, when it comes full blown, to dig itself deeper into our soul than the notion of Newtonian inertia ever sounded, deep as that was?

A child must be confounded when he hears of a time when his father was a little boy, when his father was he, and he was not. What role does it play in his imagination that his father was once too small to protect? Does it carry a scent of the notion that one day he himself will protect another?

2. In spite of all the rift between Job and his friends, or between Job and God, or between Job and Job, one thing seems to be held in common; on all hands round, not wealth or what is sometimes called “manliness,” but Justice is seen to be the highest human virtue. There is also, at least on Job’s part, the feeling that there is some common understanding concerning what things are just and what things are unjust, regardless of however rough and readymade that understanding might be for Job.

The disagreement, however, seems to center itself on a question concerning the guarantor of that justice. Job believes in that guarantor, but with his own eyes he can see nothing guaranteed.

3. There is something of the oxymoronic about this phrase. It hovers between the legal and the prelegal.

4. “eating”

5. This translation requires reading *berhem* for *barehem* (see Gordis, *The Book of Job*, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 5738, p. 348).

In the note to 3:11, there was a brief discussion of the importance of the words “womb” and “belly.” In that note I discussed the importance these two words have for each of the three speakers. But now we must take a second look at Job.

This chapter either is or leads up to Job’s last words. They are, so far as one can tell, an honest attempt to recount his way of life. They are intended to assure his three friends that his actions have always been in accordance with justice, as that term is understood by the tradition, the fathers, and the law. For the tradition, it is the guarantor who stands behind this understanding.

Job’s position, however, seems more nearly expressed by the words

Job 31:15 Did not He who made me in my mother’s belly make him as well?
Did He not form us in the same womb?

Even at the very beginning of the book, Job had said:

Job 1:21 Naked I came out of my mother’s belly and naked I shall return
there.

In verse 15, Job implies that what supports his understanding of justice differs from the foundation as understood by the tradition. For each, the foundations are closely connected to what we have called sociality, the forces which bring men together. As hitherto understood, sociality stood in opposition to autonomy.

For Job, the world of sociality had become a painful world. It concealed the human need for autonomy in very brutal ways. In his former understanding, the womb, which was often related to death, was a place of quietness where each could rest wholly undisturbed and wholly unrelated to any other.

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

We are beginning to see a different Job, one who is beginning to spell out to himself the implications of what the comic Job had said in Chapter 1. Verse 15 indicates that sociality may have a more cosmic origin and have its roots in an original unity rather than in a later coming together.

Such thoughts are not wholly foreign to the Bible, but they must be understood within their proper context. The first ten chapters of the book of Genesis do indeed give an account of the coming-to-be of all men from one original man, and tell the story of the development of that world up until the time of the Flood. It must be noted that after Noah's drunken spree, however, not one of these incidences or characters is ever mentioned again either in the Torah or in the earlier prophets. The names Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden, Cain, Abel, Noah and his ark, are totally dropped from the text. Once the covenant has been made between God and the animate world, only it is to be relied upon, and nothing is to be established on a more primitive foundation. All is forgotten in Noah's drunken spree, and only Ham, the cursed one, perhaps by accident, became aware of his antediluvial origins. (For a further discussion, see Robert D. Sacks, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* [Lewiston, NY: Mellon Press, 1990].)

If Job, as seems to be the case, sees sociality as having its justification not in a guarantor who guarantees that each will receive his just rewards, but in some form of original unity, the distinction between autonomy and sociality begins to evaporate. Perhaps these things are not very clear to Job, but they do indicate his need to raise those difficulties which would eventually send him into the tempest. Making clear to himself the implications of this way of understanding what lies beneath the surface would imply that he must face the world which he so much feared when he spoke of becoming "a brother to the Jackal."

For the present, however, Job wishes to make clear to his friends that they are all in fundamental agreement concerning the place of justice in human action no matter how much they may disagree about the nature of its foundations.

6. Literally, "her."

7. This Job and his friends share: that neither wealth nor beauty but justice, is of ultimate importance, although the verse shows that this is not due to any lack of sensitivity to beauty on Job's part.

8. Greenberg starts off with "Did I" and the Revised Standard translates it as an "if" clause, but neither one works as well in light of the verse as a whole.

9. Job is pleased and confident that his followers honor justice more than they honor their leader. It is indeed a sign of his virtue as a leader.

10. The theme of “doors,” *delet^h* and of “openings,” *petah*, is an important part of our story. The subject first strikes one as one is comparing the two visits that the messengers made, one to Abraham:

Gen. 18:1 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the opening of his tent in the heat of the day. (3)

the other to Lot:

Gen. 19:6 Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, (4)

In each case the number in parentheses indicates the number of times the word in question is used in the passage as a whole.

Lot lived in a house. Houses have doors, doors that open and shut. Abraham lived in a tent. Tents have only openings.

Gen. 19:2 He said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the night in the square.”

That, so far as one can tell, is the first time the word “house” was unambiguously used to refer to an actual physical structure.

The story of doors, which begins with Lot, like the story of the city (see note to 11:6), originates in violence:

Gen. 19:5ff and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.” Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him. . . . Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.”—But they replied, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door. (6)

In order to see the deep significance of the fact that Job’s “door,” is “open,” we must look at the full range of all the verses in which doors are spoken of as being either open or not open. This list is complete.

Often open doors lead to horror:

Judg. 3:25 So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.

The story continues

Judg. 19:22 While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him."

Judg. 19:27 In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold.

The story continues and includes in the rape of Tamar:

2Sam. 13:17 He called the young man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her" (3)

They can seem joyful, but they are ominous, as Jephthah learns:

Judg. 11:31 "then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering."

Judg. 11:34 Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And when he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me; for I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow."

They are torn down by Samson:

Judg. 16:3 But Samson lay only until midnight. Then at midnight he rose up, took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that is in front of Hebron.

They can lead to fear:

1Sam. 3:15 Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli.

They can be connected with madness:

ISam. 21:13 So he changed his behavior before them; he pretended to be mad when in their presence. He scratched marks on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle run down his beard.

and slavery:

Exod. 21:6 then his master shall bring him before God. He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.

Deut. 15:17 then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his earlobe into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. You shall do the same with regard to your female slave.

or lamentation:

Zech. 11:1 Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars!

or are only open for the sake of taking flight:

2Kings 9:3 Then take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus says the LORD: I anoint you king over Israel.' Then open the door and flee; do not linger."

2Kings 9:10 The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and no one shall bury her." Then he opened the door and fled.

or the doors are shut:

Neh. 7:3 And I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot; while the gatekeepers are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their watch posts, and others before their own houses."

Neh. 13:19 When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. And I set some of my servants over the gates, to prevent any burden from being brought in on the sabbath day.

or an open door is only a thing to be hoped for:

Prov. 18:16 A gift opens doors; it gives access to the great.

God has opened them, but only the ones in heaven:

Ps. 78:23 Yet he commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven;

Perhaps that is why God never taught Noah how to make a door.

Gen. 6:16 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the opening of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.

Gen. 7:16 And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

Abraham had an opening and Lot had a door. Openings are the place of innocent people, people like Tamar and Uriah who in their innocence trusted too much.

Gen. 38:14 she put off her widow's garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the opening of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage.

2Sam. 11:9 But Uriah slept at the opening of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.

When Judah and his brothers returned to Egypt expecting to be accused of theft, they were met by a friendly man in an opening:

Gen. 43:19 So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the opening to the house.

Some people also die at openings, but they are all bad people like Korach:

Num. 16:27 So they got away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the opening of their tents, together with their wives, their children, and their little ones.

and Sisrah;

Judg. 4:20 He said to her, "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'"

and the bad Abimelech:

Judg. 9:52 Abimelech came to the tower, and fought against it, and came near to the opening of the tower to burn it with fire.

also in this group is:

Deut. 22:21 then they shall bring the young woman out to the opening of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death, because she committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

We can also include Jezebel, but as we shall see, she doesn't really count.

2Kings 11:16 So they laid hands on her; she went through the horses' opening to the king's house, and there she was put to death.

The Tent of Meeting, The Tabernacle, and the Court all had openings, but we will not go through them all.

Exod. 33:9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the opening of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.

But then the opening fell into hard times: The dream of openness had come to an end.

1Sam. 2:22 Now Eli was very old. He heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Although the Tent of Meeting will be mentioned once more in the text, that was the last time it was ever used so far as we are told. Perhaps we should have known from the beginning that this experiment in openness was not to last:

Gen. 4:7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the opening; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

First Kings Chapter 6, verse 31, reads

For the opening to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olivewood; the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided.

This is the first time the two words have come together. It is the building of the temple. Art, born of the sons of Cain, has been sanctified and has sanctified many other things. The last time the Tent of Meeting was mentioned, it was to speak of the day when the holy vessels were taken from the tent to be put into the temple, and so to be placed behind a door.

1Kings 8:4f. So they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.

Only twice will it actually happen that a door is opened in joy and without fear, once in the glorious and almost mythical reign of King Hezekiah. It is presented as a vision of things as they ought to be. First we must try to get a sense of the times.

- 2Chron. 29:2 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, just as his ancestor David had done.
- 2Chron. 29:17 They began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD; then for eight days they sanctified the house of the LORD, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.
- 2Chron. 30:5 So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the passover to the LORD the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed.
- 2Chron. 30:26 There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.
- 2Chron. 31:1 Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, all to their individual properties.
- 2Chron. 31:10 The chief priest Azariah, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, "Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and have plenty to spare; for the LORD has blessed his people, so that we have this great supply left over."
- 2Chron. 32:5 Hezekiah set to work resolutely and built up the entire wall that was broken down, and raised towers on it, and outside it he built another wall; he also strengthened the Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance.

All of this begins when, for the first time in the text, we hear with joy and not fear, the words:

2Chron. 29:3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them.

The next time we hear those words is at the beginning of the new life after the return from Babylon:

Isa. 45:1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed!

Our verse in Job is the only other time in the whole of the Bible that a door has felt like an entrance.

“I left no stranger sleeping out of doors but opened my doors to the traveler . . . was I so shattered by family disgrace that I would stand petrified, not daring to go out the opening?”

Here we see Job with the courage to stand at the opening, while providing a door for the stranger.

11. We are now quite close to the culmination of Job’s speech. The beginning of his final argument is based on his way of being. His willingness to stand at the opening of his world and to risk going beyond it indicates a man not “shattered by family disgrace.” This “family disgrace” is here equated with the concept of “perversion,” as we have discussed it in the note to 11:6. If I understand the grammar correctly, Job is arguing that the feelings of guilt and perversion, which stem from the responsibility we have had to bear for the acts of the fathers, if not concealed, led to a terror of all that is around us. Like Lot the fear we have of the beginnings of the city leads us deeper and deeper into the city, and to doors. We therefore stand petrified and cannot allow ourselves to peer beyond the city. But Job now stands at the opening.

12. And now we have such a book in our hands. It contains the speeches of Eliphaz, Bildad, and the rest of those who have a quarrel against Job. In Chapter 19, Job had said:

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?

The two books Job longed for have become one book. It is a dialogue in which each has tried to articulate the ground upon which he stands, and, if only by implication, the horizon under which he stands.

13. “raise”

14. Here Job seems to be clear that a complete articulation of his own position is not possible except in the context of a complete articulation of the thought and hence the accusations of those who appose him.

These accusations, however, must be weighed not in the light of Job's speeches, over which there is still a living controversy, but in the light of his actions, or, as he puts it, "my every step."

15. As we have seen, there is a disagreement between Job and his friends concerning the true foundations of justice. From the point of view of his friends, Job's understanding of justice has no foundation, and he is, therefore, an unjust man. Job understands their position. He has no proof with regard to the ultimate value of the purely human perspective concerning the just and the unjust. Such things must still be open. Verses 38 through 40, Job's last words, are a counterpart to Bildad's last speech at the end of Chapter 25. They state the parameters within which mutual existence is possible.

For them, Job is an unjust man. It is understandable that they should proclaim that injustice, and indeed perhaps it would be wrong of them not to do so. But if that understanding of the world and man's place in it should lead them so to misinterpret any definite act of Job's as to accuse him unjustly of some specific act of injustice, then regardless of how that complaint may have been voiced, there can no longer be any grounds for mutual respect.

16. The word *tam*, which, for the sake of unity, I have rather slavishly and doggedly rendered as "simple" throughout the whole of the translation, must now be faced in all its complexity.

The first thing to be pointed out is its critical importance for nearly all the voices to be heard in the Book of Job. In that sense, at least, it binds the proem (Chapters 1 and 2) to the rest of the book. For each it is a virtue, if not the highest virtue. This remains true no matter how much they may disagree about other matters. Even his wife knows that the central issue is his TAM. Only the Satan, Zophar, and the Voice in the Tempest never mention it.

God

1:1 He was a *tam* and straightforward man, a GOD-FEARING man who turned away from evil.

1:8 He is a *tam* and straightforward man, a GOD-FEARING man and one who turns away from evil.

2:3 He is a *tam* and straightforward man, a GOD-fearing man and one who turned away from evil.

Job's Wife

2:9 And his wife said to him, "You are still holding tight to your *tam*."

Eliphaz

4:6f. But may not that FEAR itself be your surety, and your hope, the *tam* of your ways? Think back now, who being innocent was ever lost?

Bildad

8:20 But surely God will neither have contempt for a *tam* man nor strengthen the hand of the evildoer.

Job

27:5 Even till death I shall not turn my *tam* from me.

Elihu

36:4 One who has *tam* knowledge is among you.

Although each praises the *tam* in his own way, it is not clear that they would totally agree on which things are *tam* and which are not.

Even the beginnings of the word are somewhat unclear. Its most rudimentary meaning seems to be “finished”:

1Kings 7:22 On the tops of the pillars was lily-work. Thus the work of the pillars was *tam*.

The word “finished” has a certain duality to it, however. A new car just off the assembly line is all “finished”; but after its first bad wreck, it is also “finished.” This antithesis is felt more strongly in Hebrew than in English because the English word “finish” is felt to be the end of a process in either case, no matter whether that process leads to excellence or to destruction. The word *tam*, on the other hand, does not quite contain the notion of process to hold it together.

Gen. 47:18 When that year was *tam*, they came to him the following year, and said to him, “We cannot hide from my lord that our money is *tam*; and the herds of cattle are my lord’s. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands.

From here it acquires that special meaning of the word which implies a kind of excellence. Think of the word “finish” as it is applied to fine furniture

1Kings 6:22 Next he overlaid the whole house with gold, in order that the whole house might be *tam*; even the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold.

In that sense, it came be used of human plans:

2Sam. 20:18 Then she said, “They used to say in the old days, ‘Let them inquire at Abel’; and so it was *tam*.”

or of a lamb worthy of being used in a sacrifice:

Exod. 12:5 Your lamb shall be *tam* a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

In his final song, David sings:

2Sam. 22:33 The God who has girded me with strength has set free my path to be *tam*.

as if men were in fetters which prevent them from being *tam*, as if the *tam* were somehow man's natural state.

This man, the man who is *tam*, as we saw in the long note at the end of Chapter 11, is neither the man of the city, nor the man of the field, but the man living in tents.

Gen. 25:27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a *tam* man, living in a tent.

It can also mean "innocent," either in the sense of having committed a crime while being unaware of certain critical facts:

1Kings 22:34 But a certain man drew his bow and in his *tam* struck the king of Israel . . .

or because one is not capable of suspicion.

Gen. 20:5f. "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' I did this in the *tam* of my heart and the innocence of my hands." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the *tam* of your heart; furthermore it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.

It is also used to describe the individual virtue of an individual man apart from whatever virtue might give excellence as a founder or leader:

Gen. 6:9 These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, *tam* in his generation; Noah walked with God.

Gen. 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be *tam*."

In answer to Bildad's statement:

Job 8:20 But surely God will neither have contempt for a *tam* man nor strengthen the hand of the evildoer.

Job says:

Job 9:20ff. I am *tam* but He will show me perverse. I am *tam* but I no longer care and have only contempt for my life. . . . Therefore I say that *tam* or guilty He destroys all.

For Job, "the twisted" *'aqash* emerges as the prime opposite of the *tam*. This is the only time the word occurs in the text, and seems to be a more forceful

substitute for the term, ‘*aven*, bent, the word we have been translating as “perverse.”

Prov. 10:9 Whoever walks in *tam* walks securely, but whoever follows twisted (*‘aqash*) ways will be found out.

Prov. 28:18 One who walks in *tam* will be saved, but whoever follows twisted (*‘aqash*) ways will fall into the Pit.

What appears to be *tam* from Job’s human perspective seems to him to appear as “the twisted” from the divine perspective. And yet Job sees his *tam* as his only way to justice.

31:6–8 Let Him weigh me on the scales of justice, and then God will know of my *tam*. If my step has wandered from the way, my heart gone after my eyes, or a taint stuck to my hand, then let me sow, but another eat, or let my crop be uprooted.

27:05 Even till death I shall not turn my *tam* from me.

The ambiguity inherent in the *tam* may be seen by comparing Eliphaz’s statement:

4:6f. But may not that FEAR itself be your surety, and your hope, the *tam* of your ways? Think back now, whoever being innocent was ever lost?

with Job’s

12:4 But now I have become a joke to my friends, one who would ‘Call on God and have him answer’—a joke, a *tam*, innocent joke!

Is the *tam* related to Eliphaz’s simple acceptance or to Job’s simple question? The one looks to the other as a joke. And now Job’s whole speech has been called *tam*.

The Book of Job

Translation and Commentary on Chapters 32 through 38

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

1 Now, the three men ceased to reply to Job because he was right in his own eyes. **2** But Elihu¹ the son of Barachel,² of the House of Ram³ was angry at Job; fuming, because he⁴ considered himself more just than God. **3** And his anger burned against his three friends because they could find no answer but merely condemned Job. **4** Now Elihu held back his words and waited for Job, because they were all older than he was. **5** But, when Elihu saw that no answer came from the mouths of these three men, anger burned within him.⁵

6 Then Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite⁶ answered and said: "I am but young in years, and you are most venerable, and so I shrunk back and FEARED to declare my thoughts in front of you. **7** I said to myself 'Let the generations speak, and fullness of years proclaim wisdom.' **8** But surely there is a spirit in mortals, a breath of the Almighty that gives him understanding. **9** It is not the great who are wise, nor is it the elders who understand judgment."⁷

10 Thus, I say unto you, 'Hear me. I myself shall declare my thoughts.' **11** I have waited in expectation for your words and listened for your understanding while you searched for something to say. **12** I observed you carefully and there was none to confute Job nor was there an answer to his assertions from any of you."⁸

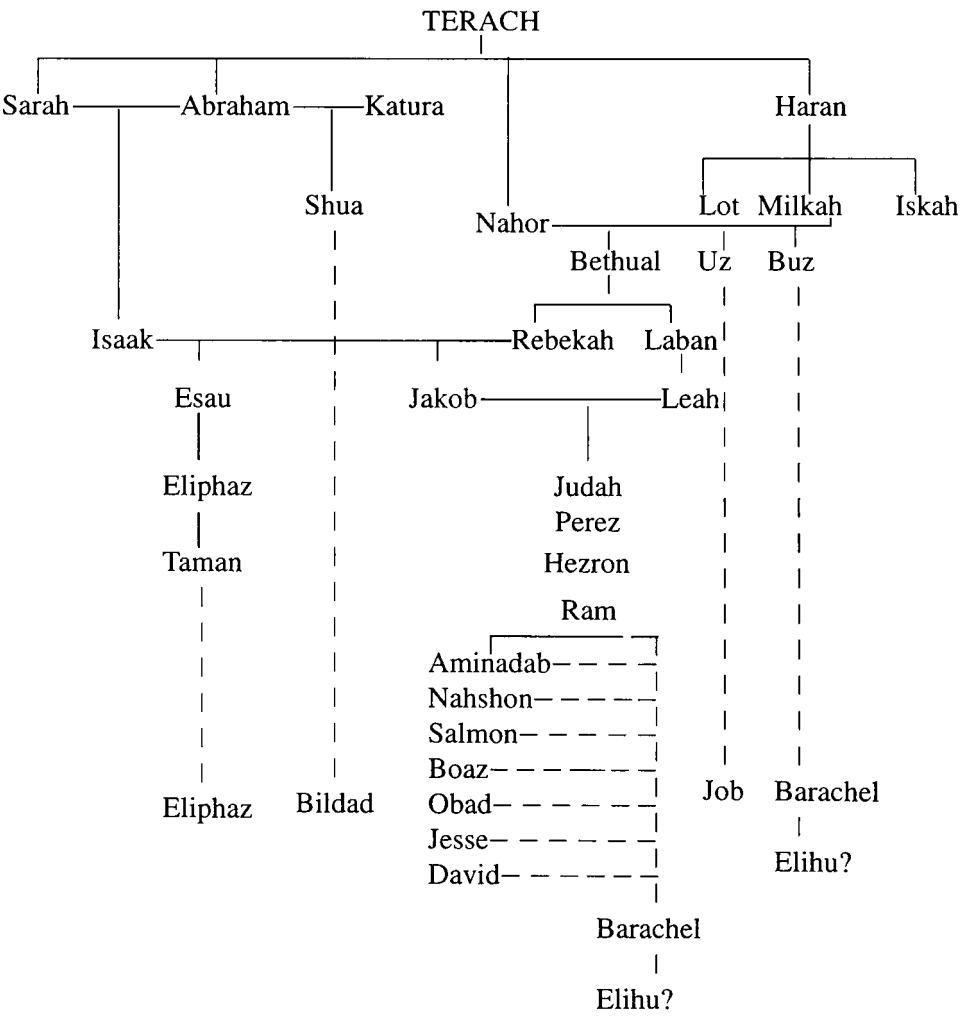
13 Beware of saying We have found wisdom; God will defeat him not man."⁹ **14** Now, he has set out no words against me and I shall not reply using your reasonings, **15** for they have been shattered, and can no longer reply. All meaning¹⁰ has left them."¹¹

16 I waited in expectation till they had finished speaking, till they stood and could no longer reply. **17** But now I shall give my side of the matter. I myself shall declare my thoughts. **18** I am full of words, and the wind¹² in my belly presses upon me; **19** my belly is like wine that has no vent, like jugs of new wine ready to burst; **20** I shall speak, and it will expand me; I shall open my lips and reply. **21** I will show no favor or flatter any man ('adam); for I know no flattery. **22** Or may my maker soon carry me off."

The first thirty-one chapters of the translation and commentary appeared in Volume 24, Numbers 2 and 3, and Volume 25, Numbers 1 and 2 of *Interpretation*. The balance will appear in a future issue.

Comments

- 1. There is something mysterious about the sudden appearance of this man, and the mystery will only increase as we read on. As we shall see, there are too many internal problems of the same sort to account for them by assuming the passage was added as a whole without much regard for the greater context.
- 2. Otherwise unknown.
- 3. Given the other cases, the reader is naturally led to assume that Elihu is a descendent of Ram the son of Hezron. This would place him as either part of or at least close to the royal line of the House of David.
- 4. It is not perfectly clear who the antecedent is.
- 5. Literally, “and his nose was fuming.” This is the same expression used in verse 3 and is commonly, though not exclusively, used of God.
- 6. Let us look once more at the tree of generations



As we can see, there was something misleading about the genealogy of Elihu as given in verse 2. When we were first introduced to him, we were told that he was of the House of Ram. We then naturally inferred that he was a descendant of Judah, and hence part of, or at least close to, the royal line, the House of David. According to verse 6, however, this turns out to be deceptive. He is, in fact, the progeny of some otherwise unknown Ram, a descendant of Buz, the younger brother of Uz.

7. One cannot help being moved initially by this young man. He seems respectful and mild, but he also seems to speak with an air of understanding and authority. Several times he speaks of the deference he is wont to pay to his elders, and the FEAR he feels in rising to speak among them. Nonetheless, he feels strongly that he must speak out.

8. Again he presents himself as a patient young man who was willing to listen to others. He implies that Job's arguments deserved to be heard before he can be answered.

9. This sentence is somewhat critical to our attempt to understand Elihu, but the grammar is ambiguous. Greenberg translates: "I fear that you will say 'We have found the wise course; God will defeat him not man.'" A more literal translation may help:

"[Lest] [you say] [we have found] [wisdom] [God] [will defeat him] [not] [man]."

Since Hebrew does not use quotation marks, we are left with two possible readings:

"Lest you say, 'We have found wisdom: God will defeat him not man.'"

"Lest you say, 'We have found wisdom,' God will defeat him not man."

It's hard, if not impossible, to know for certain either way.

The first reading would mean that the others wrongfully claim to have found a certain wisdom, and that their wisdom consists of the knowledge that "God will defeat him, not man." In other words Elihu is accusing the other three of believing that there is no answer to Job or to his questions which is available within the realm of human understanding. The remainder of his speech, then, will be a purely human attempt to answer Job.

According to the second interpretation, he is accusing them of believing that they have found a certain wisdom with which they can defeat Job, whereas in fact only "God will defeat him not man." If this is how the verse is to be understood, we can only take him to be asserting that the remainder of his speech is spoken with more than human authority.

10. "words"

11. As we began to see in verse 9, Elihu, in spite of his piety, like Job, does not share the horizons of the fathers: "It is not the great who are wise, nor is it the elders who understand judgment." The words "no longer" seem to imply that for him, too, an older world has been shattered, but as yet we do not know the cause.

12. or "spirit"

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

1 "Attend my words, Job. Listen well to each utterance that I make. 2 Behold, I open my lips, and the tongue in my palate begins to speak. 3 My speech is an upright heart. The thoughts of my lips speak with clarity. 4 The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

5 Answer me, if you can. Lay your case out before me and take your stand. 6 Here I am, just as you wished, standing in for God,¹ though I too was nipped² from clay, 7 and terror of me will not overwhelm you, nor does the pressure I put upon you weigh too heavily.³

8 Oh, you have spoken it into my ear, and I still hear the sound of each word.⁴ 9 'I am pure,'⁵ 'free of transgression,'⁶ 'I am clean,'⁷ 'There is no perversion about me,'⁸ 10 'He finds ways to oppose me,'⁹ and 'He thinks of me as his enemy.'¹⁰ 11 'He puts my feet in the stocks.'¹¹ 'He scrutinizes my every wandering.'¹²

12 But in this you have not acted justly. I will answer you, for God is greater than any mortal. 13 Why do you vie with Him? He is not obliged to answer on every count. 14 Yet God may speak once, even twice, but none take note.¹³ 15 It may be in a dream, or in a vision of the night, when heavy sleep falls upon mortals as they slumber in their beds.¹⁴

16 He unveils the ears of mortals and places His seal upon their discipline,¹⁵ 17 to turn man ('adam) away from action and conceal¹⁶ pride from the man (*geb_her*).¹⁸ He will keep his soul back from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.¹⁷

19 He is tried by pain in his bed and his bones ceaselessly twist in strife.¹⁸ 20 His life renders his bread loathsome, and his soul takes no delight in fine food.¹⁹ 21 His flesh is devoured, no longer to be seen, and his bones are ground away and disappear.²⁰ 22 His soul draws near to the Muck and his life is [attracted] to [all that] brings death.²¹

23 If there only were a messenger,²² an interpreter²³—one in a thousand, to tell man ('adam) what is right for him,²⁴ 24 he would have mercy on him and say: 'Redeem²⁵ him from descending into the Muck, for I have found his ransom.'²⁶ 25 'Let his flesh become brighter than youth, and let him return to his springtime days.'

26 Let him but supplicate unto God and he shall be accepted and see His face²⁷ with shouts of joy, for He shall return to mortal man his sense of righteousness. 27 Let him only stand squarely in front of mortals and say, 'I have sinned; I have dealt perversely with what was right, and my accounts have not been settled.' 28 Thus He shall redeem his soul from passing into the Muck; and his life shall see in the light.²⁸

29 Yes, God will do all these things two or three times for a man (*geb_her*), 30 to bring his soul back from the Muck to be made bright by the light of life.

31 Pay heed, Job, and hear me; be silent and I will speak. 32 If you have the

words, respond to me. Well, speak! for I wish to justify you. 33 But, if you have nothing, then listen to me. Be silent and I will teach you wisdom.”²⁹

Comments

1. *hen* “*ni k^ep^hik^ha l^e‘el* Greenberg translates: “You and I are the same before God” The Revised Standard translates: “Behold, I am towards God as you are.” The King James translates: “Behold, I am, according to thy wish in God’s stead.”

It is clear that this is a critical passage in our attempt to understand who Elihu is, or at least who he claims to be and perhaps even believes himself to be. It is also a very difficult passage to understand, as you can tell by the vast discrepancies in the translations. The problem lies in the meaning of the word (*k^ep^hik^ha*). It come from the root *ph* meaning “mouth.” The initial (*k^e*) primarily means “like” or “as,” but its affect can vary greatly in individual cases. For instance, *‘asher* means “which” or “that”; but “ means “when.” The final (*k^ha*) ending is a second personal ending. When attached to verbs or prepositions it is objective; when attached to nouns it is possessive. The problem is what they mean when strung out together. The word *k^ep^hi* usually means something like “according to,” but looking at several examples may help:

Exod. 16:21	Each morning let each man gather “according to” his eating.
Exod. 28:32	woven work “like/after the fashion of” a coat of mail.
Lev. 25:53	“In accordance with” his years let him repay.
Num. 7:5	Each man “according to” his work.
Num. 35:8	Each man “according to” his share.
Zech. 2:4	These are the horns which scattered Judah, “so that” no man could lift his head.
Mal. 2:9	Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people “since/according to that” you have not kept my ways.
1Chron. 12:23	And these are the number of the bands of the armed troops who came to David in Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul over to him “according to the word of” the Lord.
2Chron. 31:2	Each man “according to” his work.

As we can see, the expression never means “the same as.” The closest it ever comes to having that meaning is in Exodus 28:32, but even there one thing only provides a pattern for a totally different kind of thing. In all other cases it means “proportion to” or “according to.” Unfortunately, there is only one other instance in which the object is a thinking, speaking being, 1Chronicles 12:23, and there the expression clearly means “according to His words.”

The next part to look at is the first *l* in *l^e‘el*. In general, it is equivalent to the English word “to.” Strictly speaking, Hebrew has no independent word for “be-

come.” Thus *ha'iti melech* means “I was king”; but *ha'iti l^emelech* means “I was to king,” or more simply “I became king.”

The first words of the verse, *hen 'ani*, usually collapsed into one word *hinneneni*, mean “here am I.” When put together with the *l^e*, one finds expressions such as *hinnenu l^e'abhdechah*, “we have become slaves to you” (Genesis 50:18).

2. “Nipped” is a good word which I confess to have “nipped” from Greenberg.

3. For Elihu, Job is right. The anguished perplexities that arise within the sphere of human cognition can find for themselves no solution from within its own border. For him, too, there is a great world out there beyond the human realm. He has already rejected Bildad's Wisdom of the Fathers,

Job 32:9 It is not the great who are wise, nor is it the elders who understand judgment.

And he has seen the inadequacy of the human horizon.

32:14 Now, he has set out no words against me and I shall not reply using your reasonings, for they have been shattered, and can no longer reply. All meaning has left them.

And so he believes he understands why Job has felt himself drawn to the world of the Jackal. As early as Chapter 9, Job had said

Job 9:34f. But let Him turn his rod away from me and not frighten me with His terror, then I would speak out without FEAR of Him; for in myself I am none of these things.

and again

Job 13:19f. Now, as things are I can only remain silent and perish. But do two things for me and I shall no longer be hid from your face. Remove Your hand from me, and let not Your terror frighten me.

At the heart of Elihu's understanding of man is the notion that Job's request cannot be fulfilled. Man has not the stamina to face what lies beyond his own horizons. He offers himself as one who, knowing of the terrors that lie beyond the human sphere, can listen to Job's case from within the human sphere. Job cannot go beyond, nor is there need any longer.

4. There is something eerie about this line. Elihu insists that Job had spoken directly to him, and yet there is little indication that Job was even aware of his existence. We are not told when he arrived and do not know whether he had been there from the beginning or not. He even seems to know what Job has been saying in a rough way, and yet most of his quotations are just a bit off.

5. Not found as such, but cf. 8:6, 11:4, 16:17.

6. Not found as such.

7. Not found as such.

8. Not found as such, but cf. 13:26.

9. Not found as such.

10. 13:24

11. 13:27

12. 13:27

13. With a view to what will be said in the following note, it might be wise to remind ourselves of how the author has used the word that we have translated “to take note of” up to this point. In general, “to take note of” a person or a thing is to allow it to become a part of our world, and, hence, not “to take note of” a person or a thing is not to allow it to become a part of our world.

Job 7:8 The eye that sees me takes no note of me; your eye is upon me, and I am not.

Job 17:13–15 If I must take the Pit to be my home, and spread out my couch in darkness; call out to the muck ‘Thou art my Father’ and call out ‘Mother’ and ‘Sister’ to the maggots, Oh my hopes, who will ever take note of them?

Job 20:9 The eyes that observed him have given o’er; they no longer take note of him in his place.

Job 24:15 An adulterous eye watches at twilight, saying; “No eye will take note of me” and he conceals his face.

Job 33:14 Yet God may speak once, even twice, but none take note.

14. There is, for Elihu, one contact that man has with the realm beyond man. That contact is sleep; sleep in which we can see, and yet not “take note.” There we can allow ourselves to perceive all those things we would keep distant from our daily lives.

Zophar had already spelled it out:

Job 20:7–9 like his own dung he will be lost in eternity. Even those who see him will ask “Where is he?” He flies off as a dream and no one can find him. He recedes like a vision of the night. The eyes that observed him have given o’er; they no longer take note of him in his place.

As we shall see, Elihu is not only thinking of what is said in the Torah:

Exod. 33:20f. “But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one shall see me and live.” And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

and

Num. 12:6f. And he said, "Hear my words: When there are prophets among you, I the LORD make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Primarily he has in mind Job's own statement:

Job 7:13–15 When I said that my bed will show me compassion and my couch bear my complaint, You frightened me with dreams and terrified me with visions and I preferred strangulation and death to my own substance.

Job has already been where he wishes to go in the only way in which he can, and he has seen for himself that it is no place for waking man.

Job is unjust because he judges in terms of his own world things that can only be fairly judged in terms of a world into which he can never enter.

15. An act intended to teach, but usually implying force:

Lev. 26:22f. I will let loose wild animals against you, and they shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock; they shall make you few in number, and your roads shall be deserted. If in spite of this discipline, you have not turned back to me, but continue hostile to me, then I too will continue hostile to you: I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins.

16. "covered over"

17. Man, for Elihu, has only vague intimations of the frightful Pit that lies beyond the realm of human ken—the Muck. Irrational fear is God's signpost, not meant to punish but to warn. It is our only way of knowing that our conceit has brought us to the edge of the pit we do not see.

18. Job knows this only too well, as we have seen in the quotation from Job 7:13–15 cited in note 14.

19. And this:

Job 6:7 They are like a contagion in my daily bread.

20. And this as well:

Job 30:17 By night my bones are whittled away, and the gnawing never ceases.

And yet Job continues. He knows this all too well. But for Job, the world is more complicated, and feelings of guilt do not of themselves imply guilt:

Job 9:20 Though I am just my own mouth would condemn me.

21. This seems to be at the heart of Elihu's conviction that man must be kept from peering beyond his own horizon. The human fear of what is beyond the human is a divine gift. The fear of death is a divine rectification of the fascination that the human soul feels for death. So much he says, but he does not elaborate at this point.

22. Or "angel" or some kind of more divine being. See 1:14, 4:18, and 33:2.

23. The word has two meanings. It can mean "an interpreter," in the simple sense of one who stands between two people who speak two different languages, and to that extent who live under different horizons, and makes the thoughts of one intelligible to the other.

Gen. 42:23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter.

2Chron. 32:31 So also in the matter of the interpreter (or envoys) of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

Its more regular meaning by far, however, is "to scoff":

Isa. 28:22 Now therefore do not scoff, or your bonds will be made stronger; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord GOD of hosts upon the whole land.

Various attempts have been made to understand how the two are related. The best I can do is to quote Isaiah:

Isa. 43:27 Your first ancestor sinned, and your interpreters transgressed against me.

Job 16:20, on the other hand, seems to require something like

Oh my advocates, my friends, my eyes weep before God. Will no one argue for a MAN (*geb_her*) before God as a man (*'adam*) should do for a friend?

perhaps in the sense of those that can make his case intelligible to others.

For Elihu, Job is right, the human voice cannot make itself heard in the highest court. Job's "advocate," his "friend," cannot be just a man like himself. He must be "an interpreter," one who can stand between God and man.

24. Greenberg's translation: "To declare the man's uprightness," seems less likely because it takes *l'adam* to mean "for the man" rather than "to a man," which is a bit strange after the word "to tell"; but still it is not impossible.

25.

Exod. 13:15 When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.

Like Israel, the whole of mankind lies in debt for the conditions of their own being, a debt that they have not the means to pay. Man does not own the surface world. It is not his to inquire into and to enlarge its borders. If not paid for by one richer than man, it will all soon turn itself into Muck.

26. Cf.

Isa. 43:3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

27. This "interpreter" would conquer all the frightful things that live in the world beyond the world of man. The terrible face of God would now become the home of joyous man.

See note to 3:8.

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

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

Job would stand where he could not stand before and laugh where there was only horror because the horror would have been banished.

28. Job, for his part, has only to confess to a sin that by its nature he does not and cannot know that he has committed. Primarily, as Elihu points out, this means accepting the notion of "perversion" as it was discussed in that long note to 11:6. Job's old hopes, that the human perspective has a legitimate place in any ultimate account of things, will still "be all heaped together in the Muck," but his soul will be redeemed and pass beyond it.

29. Job has no answer and remains silent.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

1 Then Elihu answered and said: 2 "Hear my words ye wise men; give ear to me, all you who know, 3 for the ear tests words as the palate tastes food. 4 Let us choose¹ for ourselves what is lawful² so that we may know among ourselves

what is good. **5** Now Job has said; 'I am right'³ and '... that God who has thrown aside all my claims for justice,'⁴ **6** 'I declare false the judgment made against me'⁵ and 'The arrow was mortal, though I was without transgression.'⁶ **7** What man (*geb_her*) is there like Job who drinks up mockery as if it were water,⁷ **8** joins company with those who deal in wickedness and walks with mortal men of evil? **9** For he has said, 'It is of no use to a man (*geb_her*) that he be in GOD's favor.'⁸

10 And so, you men⁹ of heart, hear me; far be God from injustice and the Almighty from evil. **11** As a man ('*adam*') labors so shall he be recompensed, and wherever a man wanders, that is where he will find himself. **12** Now surely, God does not cause wickedness, nor does the Almighty turn judgment aside.

13 Who laid charge upon Him to care for the earth? Or who placed upon Him the whole of this fruitful orb? **14** If He cared to, he could gather His spirit and His breath back into Himself, **15** all flesh would perish and man ('*adam*') would return to dust.¹⁰

16 If there is such a thing as understanding, listen to this. Attend to the sound of my words. **17** Shall even he that hates judgment bind up?¹¹ Would you condemn¹² the Magnificent Just One, **18** He who can say to a king 'You are worthless,' or to the nobles, 'You are guilty men,' **19** who shows no favor to any liege, or recognizes the prince above the pauper, since they are the works of His hand, every one?¹³

20 They can die in a moment; the people tremble at midnight, and pass on. The mighty are turned aside, but by no [human] hand, **21** for His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He watches his every steps. **22** There is no darkness and there is no Shadow of Death for the worker of wickedness to hide in, **23** nor has He ever yet accorded it to man that he go with God into judgment.¹⁴

24 He shatters the magnificent, no knowing how many, and sets others up in their place. **25** Surely, He can recognize their deeds; Everything turns to night, and they are crushed. **26** He slaps them down along with the guilty in full view of all **27** because they turned away from Him and do not comprehend His **28** ways of bringing the cries of the poor unto Himself; for He hears the cry of the needy.¹⁵ **29** But, when He is silent, who can condemn? If He should hide His face, who will even take note¹⁶ of Him, be it a nation or be it a single man ('*adam*')?¹⁷

30 Mankind¹⁸ has been polluted by kingship, those who ensnare the people. **31** For he has said unto God 'I will bear it all and offend no more. **32** What I have not seen, teach me. If I have done injustice, I shall persist in it no longer.'¹⁹ **33** Should not payment for it be required²⁰ of you because you had such contempt? It is you must answer, not I. Whatever you know then, speak!

34 Men²¹ of heart, and every wise man (*geb_her*) who listen to me will say **35** 'Job has spoken without knowledge, and his words lack insight.' **36** May Job's trials know no limit, because his answers are no different from those of the men²² of wickedness. **37** He adds sin upon transgression, slaps us in the face, and continually speaks against God."

Comments

1. It is interesting to note that Elihu speaks in terms of choice rather than inquiry.

2. *mis^hpat^h*

3. "I am right." Not found as such. But see 9:15 and 10:15:

Job 9:15 But even though I am in the right still I cannot do it. Yet I must plead for what seems to me just.

Job 10:15 Well, if I have been guilty the grief is mine, but even when I am right I have been so sated with reproach that no feeling of honor is left in me.

4.

Job 27:2 By the life of that God who has thrown aside all [my claims for] justice, the Almighty has embittered my soul!

5. Not found as such.

6. Not found as such. But see:

Job 6:3f. And thus I speak without care, for the arrows of the Almighty are upon me and my spirit drinks in their venom.

7. The significance of "drinking" as it shows up from the time Job's friends appear till the end of Elihu's speech is markedly different from the connotations of the word "tasting" as we discussed them in the note to 12:11.

The complete list of quotations is:

Job 6:2-4 "Would that my indignation could truly be weighed, my calamities all laid out together on a scale! then would it raise up even the sands of the seas. And thus I speak without care, for the arrows of the Almighty are in me and my spirit drinks in their venom."

Job 15:16 And what of that abhorred and corrupted one, man, who drinks up injustice like water!

Job 21:20 Let his eyes see his own ruin and let him drink of the Almighty's cruet of fury.

Job 34:7 What man (*geb_her*) is there like Job who drinks up mockery as if it were water?

In this section of the book, "drinking" implies a taking into oneself, even greedily, the uglinesses of the outside world. For Job it is the first step in coming to terms with them. But for Eliphaz and for Elihu it is only a final way of succumbing to them.

8. Not found as such. Nonetheless, Elihu's charge that Job "joins company with those who deal in wickedness and walks with men of evil," while it may at first sound like guilt by association, is serious indeed. For a long time now Job has known that so far as he could tell, he was the first man to ask in a searching way the questions that thoughtless men have raised in thoughtless ways since time began, and Job knows that he has no proof that the difference counts for very much.

9. "mortal"

10. Job's view of man, Elihu argues, presupposes an independent world obeying its own laws and following its own nature. It assumes a world that has been placed into God's hands for safekeeping and to which He therefore has certain duties and obligations. But there is no such world. The whole structure of the world is an expression of His spirit. For man to demand justice from God would be as if we had been hauled into court by a character in one of our own dreams. With respect to God, man has no being apart from the part that has been given to him by the hand of God.

11. One can best see what Elihu means by considering the other passages in which the word has been used:

Job 5:18 for He causes pain, but He binds up, He wounds, but His hands
 heal.

Job 28:11 He binds up the flowing rivers and the hidden things come to light.

Elihu purposely uses a word that can have either a violent or gentle meaning.

12. Literally, "find guilty"

13. Job does all to establish his understanding of justice by considering it as it reveals itself purely from within the human prospective. This, argues Elihu, is true for two reasons. True justice requires the notion of equality before the law. But that equality only becomes visible when all men are seen as equally derivative from that which is beyond man. Men are equal because they are all equally the work of the hand of God, and God is equally above all. That also implies a mutual recognition of the limitations of the human sphere which apply to all men as such. For Elihu, both the judge and the standard of judgment must come from beyond. Equality before the law is compatible with structured political life only if that equality has a prepolitical foundation, but that world is closed to man.

14. Although there are no direct quotations, it is clear that in these verses Elihu is trying to address himself to what Job sees as the most serious of his charges:

Job 7:12 Am I the sea or some monster that You set watch over me?

Job 14:13 Who can move You to hide me in the Pit and conceal me till your
 anger passes? Set me a fixed limit and remember me.

Job 14:16 Then no longer would You keep track of my every step, or be on
the watch for my sin.

Elihu praises God precisely where Job had questioned. If divine justice were to model itself after human justice, as Job implies, it would leave itself open to all the wrangling, loopholes, and ambiguities that mark human justice. Its whole force resides in its unknown, and hence unquestionable character.

15. Human justice is inadequate to deal with human misdoing because it cannot reveal to men the cosmic significance of their actions. It can at best show that one or more other human beings object to the act, which would, of course, ultimately imply nothing more than the rule of the strongest. If an act is to be seen as sinful it must be seen as violating an order beyond the sphere of merely human concern. Only in that way can it become clear that the weak as weak are heard.

16. The word is intended to remind Job of much of what he had said.

Job 7:8 The eye that sees me takes no note of me; your eye is upon me, and
I am not.

Job 17:15 Oh my hopes, who will ever take note of them?

Job 20:9 The eyes that observed him have given o'er; they no longer take
note of him in his place.

17. I believe that by "If He should hide His face" he means that the acts of God can disguise themselves as acts of chance. He may be implying that at times the unknown source of retribution is part of its force, but it is not clear.

18. man (*'adam*)

19. "If I have done injustice, I shall persist in it no longer." Human justice is fundamentally flawed; a man may have been unjust without knowing it. The perversions of the fathers, those for which, according to Elihu, we are still to be held to account, are not and can never become visible from within the political horizon. Kingship, or indeed any political regime, in order to establish its own legitimacy, must neglect all prior claims. Only the individual can do expiation by acknowledging this debt, as we have seen in the case of the Egyptian children. See note to 11:6.

20. Others translate "as you see fit" or something like it. Literally, the word means "from-with-you." It usually appears in such contexts as "What does the Lord ask of you?" (Deut. 10:12) or "I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:10), but one can also find passages such as "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord" (2Sam 3:28). My own sense of the passage as a whole seems to go along better with the usage in Deuteronomy 18:10, but in the main I have tried to help the reader decide for himself.

21. "mortal"

22. "mortal"

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

1 Then Elihu answered and said: 2 “Is that what you think to be judgment? to say ‘My righteousness is greater than God’s?’¹ 3 or when you say ‘How does all this benefit you? How am I better off than if I had sinned’? 4 I will answer your words, you and your friends along with you. 5 Just look up into the heavens and see. Take note of the nebula,² how high above you it is. 6 If you have sinned how could you perturb it,³ and even if you multiply your transgressions, how could you affect it? 7 Or if you were righteous, what would you add to it? What could it gain from your hand? 8 Your evils⁴ fall upon men like yourself, and your righteousness is for sons of man (‘adam’).⁵

9 Under great oppression they cry out; they scream to be saved from mighty arms: 10 but none say ‘Where is God my maker, the one who makes songs in the night; 11 who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth; and makes us wiser than the birds of the sky.’⁶

12 There they cry out, but He gives no answer to the majestic pride of evil men. 13 Oh vanity; God will not listen, nor will the Almighty take note. 14 Particularly since you have said that you yourself take no note. Yet the case is before Him and for Him you must writhe⁷ [in uncertainty].⁸ 15 But since for the present He does not exert His anger, he foolishly misunderstands. 16 And as for Job, futility pours from his mouth. He grows heavy with words and has no comprehension.”

Comments

1. Not found as such.

2. The notion of “the nebula” is somewhat complicated for Elihu. See note to Job 36:28.

3. Others translate “Him” throughout, but there seems to me no reason for doing so.

4. Literally, “guilty [acts]”

5. For Elihu the cosmos is wholly indifferent to the fate of man and to human concerns. The pull that Job felt into a realm larger than the human realm is dangerously misdirected. In flirting with the world of the Jackal, Job is allowing himself to become enmeshed in a world in which the word “justice” is a mute sound which symbolizes nothing.

6. Job had said:

Job 10:3–4 Does it seem good to You that You oppress, that You have contempt for the toil of your own hand, but shine upon the counsel of the guilty Have You eyes of flesh? ’

But he cannot know what oppression is. Those who wonder beyond the human realm cannot marvel at the night songs of nature, or at man's preeminence among the creatures to be found there. To man it is a frightful place. He is crushed and can see nothing.

7. On the irony of this verse, see notes to 39:1.

8. "There, they cry out. . . ." For Elihu, to be attracted, for what reason it matters not, beyond the human sphere of understanding is to act with "arrogance." This is what he had in mind when he said:

Job 34:36–37 May Job's trials know no limit, because his answers are no different from those of the men of wickedness. He adds sin upon transgression, slaps us in the face, and continually speaks against God.

For him, the world beyond the world of human concern is a world devoid of the concept of justice. There is nothing in terms of which man can speak so that God can listen. Man among the jackals is left in fear and total uncertainty.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

1 And Elihu continued to speak: 2 "But wait a bit for me and I will show you. There is still another word to be said for God. 3 I will fetch my knowledge from afar to show my Maker righteous. 4 Indeed, my words are not false. One who has simple knowledge is among you.

5 God is mighty and shows no contempt—mighty in strength of heart. 6 He gives no life to the guilty but grants judgment to the poor 7 and turns not His eyes from the righteous.

As for kings about to ascend the throne, He seats them forever, and they are exalted.¹

8 But if they are bound in fetters and trapped in cords of affliction, 9 He reminds them what they have done and that they can prevail over their transgressions. 10 He unveils their ears to admonition. 11 If they can hear and obey, they will complete their days in prosperity and their years in delight. 12 But if they cannot hear, they will perish by the sword, and pass on without knowing why.² 13 The impious of heart put on anger and will not cry out for help when He afflicts them. 14 They died when their soul was yet young, for it lived among whores.³

15 But the poor He tears from their poverty and unveils their ears by force, 16 then they are lured away from the edge of narrowness⁴ into a broad place, free of stress, and their table is laden with sumptuous fare.

17 You have fulfilled the judgment of the guilty and so judgment and justice have laid hold of you. 18 Beware lest fury turn you to derision or a great ransom pull you aside. 19 Will your cries for help, even with determination of

strength, bring order to life in distress?⁵ **20** Do not pant by night eager to raze people from their places. **21** Beware, do not turn to wickedness, for that is what you have chosen rather than poverty.⁶

22 Behold, God is exalted in His power. Who can guide like Him? **23** Who can oversee His ways? or say to Him, ‘Thou hast done injustice?’

24 Remember then to exalt His works of which mortals sing. **25** Every man (*‘adam*) has beheld Him. Mortals have looked upon Him from afar.⁷

26 Behold, God is exalted but we cannot know. The number of His years cannot be unearthed. **27** He draws up droplets of water, and the moisture refines itself into His mist **28** that flows together into nebula⁸ and trickles back down upon mankind.⁹

29 Who can comprehend the expanse of the clouds, the roarings under His canopy? **30** He spreads His light out over it and covers over the roots of the sea, **31** for with them He pronounces judgment upon the nations, and provides food in abundance. **32** He covers over the lightning in His hand and commands it to strike at its mark **33** But the roaring tells of Him, amassing His anger against injustice.”¹⁰

Comments

1. Elihu began the chapter by saying, “There is still another word more to be said for God,” as if what he was about to say were a kind of additional thought consequent to what he had said before. He speaks of “fetching his knowledge from afar” and stresses the truth of what he is about to say. Before going into it, however, he reiterates his commitment to justice and to the cause of the poor.

What he then has to say is, indeed, new, and indeed a bit shocking, but it must be understood properly:

“As for kings about to ascend the throne, He seats them forever, and they are exalted.”

Taken in and by itself, this verse reads much like what we would call “the Divine Right of Kings.” However much this statement may be qualified in the verses that follow, and no matter how critical those qualifications turn out to be, the verse must be faced in itself.

For Elihu, the home of man is the only proper home for man. Nothing in the visible universe beyond the realm of man can support the human, that is to say, the political sphere. In that sense, there can be no such thing as Natural Right, or prepolitical Self-Evident Truths upon which the political regime is to be founded, and therefore in the light of which it can be questioned.

2. Monarchy is limited not by inalienable rights, but by divine providence. Even foreign tyrants who intend no good become tools in the unseen hands of God.

2Kings 24:2 And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets.

3. Literally, “holy ones,” but the reference is clearly to pagan temple whores.

4. *sar* just Job’s feelings. See note to 6:23.

5. The meaning of the text is obscure. Greenberg translates: “Though you are obsessed with the case of the wicked, the justice of the case will be upheld. Let anger at his affluence not mislead you; let much bribery not turn you aside. Will your limitless wealth avail you, all your powerful efforts?”

The Revised Standard translates: “But you are full of the judgment of the wicked; judgment and justice seize you. Beware lest wrath entice you into scoffing; and let not the greatness of the ransom turn you aside. Will your cry avail to keep you from distress, or all the force of your strength?”

6. Job, like a guilty man, has strayed beyond the realm of human society. He has, in that sense, become an outlaw among other outlaws. What tempted him to follow them may be of little importance. Once there, he will find himself to be as one of them. He may have entered fully determined to find justice and order, but he will find that there is nothing of them to be found there. His cries will go unheard, nothing there will remind him of justice. For Elihu, no son of Adam can remain just in a world in which there is no foundation for the concept of justice.

7. Therefore, insofar as the human horizons point beyond themselves, they point not to nature and its laws, but to God and His guiding providence. It is not a time for inquiry, but a time for song and exaltation.

8. The root of the word we have translated as “nebula” means “to wear away” or “to pulverize or beat into a powder”:

Exod. 30:34f. The LORD said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onychia, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy.

or

2Sam. 22:43 I beat them into a powder like the dust of the earth, I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets.

In that sense, we have already seen the root used in Job:

Job 14:19 The waters have worn the stones away and its torrents have washed away the dust of the land.

As a noun, it first refers the dustlike particles in their smallness and their manyness. When Isaiah says:

Isa. 40:15 Behold, the nations are like a drop out of a bucket, and are considered like the dust on the [pans of a] balance: behold, he lifts up the islands as if they were a fleck.

the imagery gathers its force from the fact that although the number of particles of dust on the pan is beyond man's capacity to count, together they mean nothing, since no one feels cheated when they are weighed in along with his purchase.

Often it is used of a temporary whole which is broken up daily:

Prov. 3:20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds [nebulae] drop down the dew.

Sometimes it is a more enduring thing, but one can still see that the nebula in itself was once a mass of separate bits, a shapeless, almost liquidlike cluster of individual fragments until God made them stand firmly together as a whole:

Prov. 8:28 . . . when he made firm the skies [nebulae] above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

At other times it looks more lasting:

Ps. 89:37 It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven.

9. man ('adam)

10. According to Elihu, the visible universe beyond man is directed by the hand of God solely towards the good of man and his concerns:

He spreads His light out over it and covers over the roots of the sea, for with them He pronounces judgment upon the nations, and provides food in abundance.

If Job is tempted into that world, however, he will be faced only by the nebula and the constant roaring. To man, God's labyrinthine complex of delicately interwoven ends will seem no more than a roaring mass of anger, an incoherent nebula.

Throughout the passage Elihu speaks of the way in which God covers over or hides from mankind the frightful origins as they manifest themselves in the

“roots of the sea” and “the lightning that strikes.” We have already seen something of Elihu’s notion that Job, by his demand to question, threatens to break through the barrier that God has placed between man and his destruction:

Job 33:17 He unveils the ears of mortals and places His seal upon their discipline, to turn man (*‘adam*) away from action and conceal (cover over) pride from the man (*geb_her*). He will keep his soul back from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

Job, too, at one time had such thoughts:

23:17 I was not destroyed by the darkness only because He had concealed [covered over] its thick murk from me.

Even now it is a struggle for Job, but for him the question, and the need to see for oneself, and with one’s own human eyes, keeps reasserting itself at each turn.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

1 “At this too my heart trembles and leaps from its place. 2 Listen, listen well to the rage¹ in His voice and the groaning that comes up out of His mouth. 3 Straight down it comes under the whole of heaven. His light² goes out to the ends of the earth, 4 and then, a roaring voice.³ He thunders with the voice of His majestic pride,⁴ but none that hear His voice can pursue. 5 God thunders marvels with His voice, working great things, though we can never know them. 6 For to the Snow He says ‘fall to the ground,’ and to the rain ‘pour down,’ and the rain is a downpour of His might.

7 The whole of mankind⁵ He has sealed up so that they may know each mortal as one of His works, 8 like a beast that goes in for shelter and settles down into its lair 9 when the tempest comes out of its chamber, cold from its scattering place.⁶ 10 The breath of God turns all to ice, and the wide waters are cast like bronze. 11 He weighs down the clouds with moisture, and the lightning-cloud spews out its bolt. 12 On a topsyturvy course He steers them to accomplish all that He has commanded them upon the face of this fruitful orb. 13 Whether by love or by the lash, so He founds it upon His land.⁷ 14 Hear this, Job. Stand at attention and contemplate the wonders of God. 15 Do you know how God lays charge upon His cloud when the radiation appears?⁸ 16 Do you know how the clouds are kept in balance, the wonders of simple knowledge? 17 or even how your clothing keeps you warm when the land has respite from the southern wind?⁹ 18 Can you beat the nebula into a great expanse, firm as a mirror cast like molten metal?

19 Tell us then, what shall we say to Him? We cannot lay out our case

because of the darkness. **20** Does anything get through to Him when I speak? Can a man speak when he is about to be swallowed up?¹⁰

21 Now, not a man sees the light though it shine blinding bright in the nebula, not till a passing spirit shall make them pure.¹¹ **22** Out of the north there comes a golden splendor. A frightful majesty rests upon God. **23** The Almighty—none will find Him. He is ever multiplying in might and in right¹², abundant in judgment; giving neither wrack nor reason.¹³ **24** Thus mortals¹⁴ hold in FEAR¹⁵ the one whom even the wise of heart have never seen.”

Comments

1. A passion that Job has seen in God, in earth, and in man:

- Job 3:17 There the guilty cast off their rage and there rest those whose power is spent.
Job 3:26 I was not at ease, I was not quiet, I had no rest, but rage came.”
Job 9:6 Who can cause the earth to reel from its place till its pillars quake!
Job 12:6 Oh, there is peace enough in the tents of robbers and security for those who enrage God, which God Himself has placed in their hand.
Job 14:1 Man (*‘adam*) is born of woman, short-lived and full of rage.

2. It is very hard to know what to do at this point. Most translate by the word “lightning,” and, clearly enough, that is what Elihu means. However, the word he uses is the simple everyday word for light, and that is indeed the way the word first hits the ear. This way of speech gives one a much better sense of Elihu’s feeling for the dramatic and his sense that the fearful lies close behind the mundane. What can be more peaceful, more of an airy nothing than light, and yet in a moment it can become a roaring lion.

3. With his warning words, “Listen, listen well to the rage,” Elihu is trying to give Job some picture in sound of what he will see if he wanders off into the land of the Jackal and should cross over beyond the world of man with human eyes and human ears. To him, the divine will appear as the bestial.

4. Here again we have a term wholly indifferent to good or bad, human, superhuman, or subhuman:

- Job 8:11 Can papyrus grow [show its majestic pride] where there is no marsh?
Job 10:16 You must feel the majestic pride of a lion in hunting me?
Job 35:12 There they cry out, but He gives no answer to the majestic pride of evil men.
Job 38:11 Here your [majestically] proud waves must come to rest.
Job 40:10 Come, deck yourself out in majestic pride and dignity.

5. “man” (*‘adam*)

6. Elihu likens the way in which man has been sealed up within the sphere of human understanding to a beast settled down in its den for the long winter when the cold wind blows and nature is inhospitable. The cave is man's only shelter from a world which, no matter what it may be in itself, is only a cold and frightful chaos to man.

7. The ways in which God accomplishes His commands and orders this fruitful orb, if he were to face it, would seem to man a topsyturvy course totally indifferent to its end.

8. For Elihu, the world is full of wondrous events.

9. Elihu means that if even the simplest things, the things we rely on most in our daily lives, and hence the things which are most at hand within the human sphere, are in fact unknown to man, why, then, should he expect to understand what is beyond that sphere?

10. In verse 4 of Chapter 36, Elihu had said, "One who has simple knowledge is among you." This turns out to be far from the truth. There is no court in front of which Job can lay out his case, certain that it will be heard and adjudicated. He feels himself a man about to be swallowed up by a totally indifferent nebular world. He has no way of knowing whether that world is directed from outside of itself by the hands of an all-knowing, all-caring God who listens to the prayers and needs of man or not. "Does anything get through to Him when I speak?" For him, however, there is no alternative to a steadfast belief in an all-loving God other than the senseless roar of the stormy nebula which no man can face or consider.

11. Elihu's final belief is that one day a spirit will pass by to purify the nebula. On that day man will see that from the beginning there had always been a blinding light shining bright in the nebula, though not one a man could see.

12. "judgment"

13. *lo' ya'aneh*. This is a complicated play on words which I was not able to reproduce in English by a single word. On the one hand the verb (*'nh*) means "to answer," and is the same word that has occurred so often in that stock phrase, "And X answered and said." In fact, the very next chapter, which is only one verse away, will begin with the words, "And the Lord answered Job out of the Tempest and said."

On the other hand, it also means "to afflict" or "to torment" or even "to torture." It is a particularly haunting pun. In the case of a pun, there is usually a primary meaning, the one that is intended to hit the reader first. Then there is a kind of double take when he sees, "Yes, but it could also mean. . . ." The first meaning must always come before the second, sometimes by five years, but usually the time can only be measured in milliseconds. An essential part of the humor in the pun is the unspoken agreement between the punner and the punnee as to which is the first meaning and which meaning has the punch; but in this case, there is no millisecond; one cannot tell which is the first. The sudden

recognition that a horizon has been shared where least expected is missing, and the humor falls flat.

The pun, which was not a pun, so splendidly captures the relationship between the two of them, Elihu and Job. For Elihu there can be no greater comfort than to feel that there is a loving God behind the mute raucousness of chaos, but for Job, there can be no greater torment than to have no answer.

14. This is the last time that the word I have translated “mortal” will appear in the text. Etymologically, it is, in fact, rather close to the English word “mortal.” The root means “weak,” or “sick,” or, when used of a wound or a disease, it means “incurable.” We have seen the root used in that sense already:

Job 34:6 . . . The arrow was mortal, though I was without transgression.

The reader may find the complete list helpful. He must be a bit careful, because in the plural it cannot be distinguished from the plural of the word we have translated as “man” (*geb_her*).

- Job 4:12–12 A word stole upon me but my ear caught only a trace, as one gropes in a night vision when deep sleep falls upon mortals.
- Job 4:17 . . . or a man (*geb_her*) more pure than his maker?
- Job 5:17–18 Indeed, happy is the mortal whom God disciplines, that has no contempt for the bonds of the Almighty; for He causes pain, but He binds up, He wounds, but His hands heal.
- Job 7:1 Does not a mortal have a term of duty to serve here on earth and are not his days like the days of a hired servant?
- Job 7:17 What is a mortal that thou shouldst magnify him?
- Job 9:1–2 Then Job answered and said, “Yes, all that I know, but then what can make a mortal’s justice apparent to God?”
- Job 10:4 Can You see as mortals see?
- Job 10:5 Can time mean to You what time means to man? Do your years pass by as our years?
- Job 13:9 Do you think you can deceive Him as you can deceive a mortal?
- Job 14:19 So, You have trashed all mortal hope.
- Job 15:14 What is a mortal that he should be clean or one born of woman that he should consider himself just?
- Job 25:4 How can a mortal think himself just before God or what can cleanse anyone born of woman?
- Job 25:6 And now what of these mortals, the maggots or the son of man (*‘adam*), the worm.
- Job 28:4 Abandoned by every passer by, destitute of all humanity, they wander.
- Job 28:13 No mortal knows its value.
- Job 32:8 But surely there is a spirit in mortals, a breath of the Almighty that gives him understanding.
- Job 33:12 I will answer you, for God is greater than any mortal.

- Job 33:15 It may be in a dream, or in a vision of the night, when heavy sleep falls upon mortals as they slumber in their beds.
- Job 33:16 He unveils the ears of mortals and places His seal upon their discipline, to turn man (*'adam*) away from action and conceal
- Job 33:26 Let him but supplicate unto God and he shall be accepted and see His face with shouts of joy, for He shall return to mortal man his sense of righteousness.
- Job 33:27 Let him only stand squarely in front of mortals and say, "I have sinned; I have dealt perversely with what was right, and my accounts have not been settled."
- Job 34:4–8 "God who has thrown aside all my claims for justice," "I declare false the judgment made against me" and "The arrow was mortal, though I was without transgression." What man (*geb_her*) is there like Job who drinks up mockery as if it were water, joins company with those who deal in wickedness and walks with mortal men of evil?
- Job 34:10 And so, you men of heart, hear me; far be God from injustice and the Almighty from evil.
- Job 34:34–35 Men of heart, and every wise man (*geb_her*) who listen to me will say "Job has spoken without knowledge, and his words lack insight."
- Job 34:36 May Job's trials know no limit, because his answers are no different from those of the men of wickedness.
- Job 36:24 Remember then to exalt His works of which mortals sing.
- Job 36:25 Mortals have looked upon Him from afar.
- Job 37:7–9 The whole of mankind He has sealed up so that they may know each mortal as one of His works, like a beast that goes in for shelter and settles down into its lair when the tempest comes out of its chamber, cold from its scattering place.
- Job 37:24 Thus mortals hold in FEAR the one whom even the wise of heart have never seen.

15. In a like manner, this is the last time that the word "FEAR" will appear in the text.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

1 And the LORD¹ answered Job out of the Tempest and said: 2 "Who is this one that makes counsel dark by words that have no meaning?" 3 Come,³ gird up your loins like a man (*geb_her*).⁴ I will question you, and you must let me know. 4 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Speak up, if you know! 5 Who fixed its measurements, if you have any understanding? Who stretched a measuring line round it 6 and into what were its pylons fixed? Who set the cornerstone 7 as the morning stars sang together, and the sons of GOD all shouted for joy?⁵ 8 Who closed up the sea behind the double door when first it burst⁶ out of the womb 9 when I clothed it in a cloud and swaddled it in mist,⁷

10 imposing my law upon it, and put up the bars and the double doors: **11** and said, 'To this point you may come, but no farther. Here your proud waves must come to rest.'

12 Have you yet commanded the morning, or taught the dawn to know its place, **13** to grab hold of the corners of the earth and winnow out the wicked?⁸

14 All is as transformed as clay⁹ stamped by a seal,¹⁰ and fixed¹¹ as dye in a garment. **15** But the light is withheld from the wicked, and the uplifted arm is broken.¹²

16 Have you ever come upon the source of the seas,¹³ or gone for a walk¹⁴ down by the cranny in the deep? **17** Have the gates of death¹⁵ unveiled themselves to you, or have you seen the gates of the Shadow of Death¹⁶? **18** Have you pondered the expanse of the earth? If you know all these things, declare them!

19 Which is the road to the dwelling of light? and which is the place of darkness, **20** that you may take it to its borders and know the way to its home?¹⁷

21 You know, for even then, you were born, and the number of your days is great.¹⁸

22 Have you come upon the storehouses of snow, or seen the vaults of hail **23** which I have laid aside for a time of narrowness and for the days of battle and of war?¹⁹

24 By what paths is light dispersed? How is the east wind cast about the earth? **25** Who cleaved the canals for the flooding torrent and made a pathway for the voice of the thunder,²⁰ **26** so that it might rain in a land where no man is, or in a wilderness that has no human life²¹ in it, **27** to make a surfeit of the devastation and the devastated, and make a budding field bloom?²²

28 Does the rain have a father? and who begets the drops of dew? **29** From whose belly does ice emerge, and who gave birth to the frost of heaven?²³ **30** Water draws itself up, tight as stone, and the face of the deep clutches to itself.²⁴

31 Did you bind the Pleiades together with a chain, or untie the reins of Orion? **32** Can you lead out the Mazzaroth²⁵ in its time or guide the Bear with her children? **33** Do you know the laws of the heaven,²⁶ and can you impose its authority on the earth?²⁷

34 Can you raise your voice to the clouds and be covered in a torrent of water? **35** If you send out the lightning, will it go? Will it say to you, 'Here am I'?²⁸

36 Who placed wisdom at the secret core and gave intelligibility to the outward form?²⁹ **37** And who is wise enough to tell the tale of the nebula? Who can tip the bottles of the sky, **38** to liquify the dust and cast it into congealed clods?

39 Can you hunt up prey for the lioness, and bring to fulfillment the life in its cubs **40** as they crouch in their dens or lie in ambush in their lairs? **41** Who prepares a catch for the raven when his young cry out to God for help, and he wanders about without food?³⁰

Comments

1. This is the first time the word has been used since Chapter 2.
2. Verse 2 is clearly intended as a rhetorical question, and yet, unlike most rhetorical questions, the answer is by no means obvious. Is the intended answer "Job," or is it "Elihu"? Perhaps we are not yet in a position to ask the question.
3. This is my all-too-poor attempt to capture the very moving fact that the Lord uses the word *na'*. It is roughly equivalent to the English word "please" and converts a command into a plea or a request, or, as in our case, an invitation. Needless to say it is a word the Lord uses very rarely, and each instance requires our close attention.
4. In contradistinction to the word discussed in the note to Job 37:24, the word which the Tempest uses for man, and which we have translated as man (*geb_her*), comes from a root meaning "to be strong." I was quite tempted to translate it as "hero," which would have been closer than simply using the word "man" (*'adam*). My only reason for not doing so is that there is another, somewhat modified, form of the word which does in fact mean "hero," although that form is never used in the Book of Job.

The voice seems to be reminding Job of his own first words, urging him yet to fulfill the promise inherent in his birth:

Job 3:3 Job answered and said "May the day of my birth be lost and with it that night in which it was said 'A man (*GEB_HER*) has been conceived."

and now he is being asked to gird his loins and become that man.

What more can be said? If Elihu were not nearly right, there would be no need for Job to gird his loins; and yet, if Elihu were simply right, perhaps there would be no point in it either.

Again, it may be of some help to the reader to see the complete list:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Job 3:3 | Job answered and said "May the day of my birth be lost and with it that night in which it was said 'A MAN (<i>GEB_HER</i>) has been conceived." |
| Job 3:20,23 | Why does He give light to those whom toil has consumed, or life to the bitter of soul? . . . or to a man (<i>geb_her</i>) whose way has been lost and whom God has hedged about. |
| Job 10:5 | Can time mean to You what time means to man? |
| Job 14:10 | But when a man (<i>geb_her</i>) dies, he perishes and is no more. |
| Job 14:14 | If a man (<i>geb_her</i>) dies, will he come back to life again? |
| Job 16:21 | Will no one argue for a man (<i>geb_her</i>) before God as a man (<i>'adam</i>) should do for a friend?" |
| Job 22:2 | "Can a man (<i>geb_her</i>) be of any use to his God as a prudent man can be of use to a friend? |
| Job 33:16-18 | He unveils the ears of mortals and places His seal upon their |

- discipline, to turn man ('*adam*) away from action and conceal pride from the man (*geb_her*) . and his life from perishing by the sword.
- Job 33:29–30 Yes, God will do all these things two or three times for a man (*geb_her*), to bring his soul back from the Muck to be made bright by the light of life.
- Job 34:7–8 What man (*geb_her*) is there like Job who drinks up mockery as if it were water, joins company with those who deal in wickedness and walks with men of evil?
- Job 34:9 For he has said, 'It is of no use to a man (*geb_her*) that he be in GOD's favor.'
- Job 34:34 Men of heart, and every wise man (*geb_her*) who listen to me will say 'Job has spoken without knowledge, and his words lack insight.'
- Job 38:3 Come, gird up your loins like a man (*geb_her*). I will question you, and you must let me know.
- Job 40:7 Come, gird up your loins like a man (*geb_her*). I will question you, and you must let me know.

5. The LORD begins with a whole bevy of questions, one right after the other. They are infinitely beyond Job, and he can only stand in wonder. At the same time, the questions are couched in terms such as "foundations," "pylons," "lines," and "cornerstones" that Job can very well understand. He also learns that measurement, and hence number was used.

6. This word is often used of the raging seas and the monsters in them and of a child as it bursts forth out of its mother's womb.

- Dan. 7:2 Daniel said, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up [bursting] the great sea."
- Ezek. 32:2 Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him: "You consider yourself a lion among the nations, but you are like a monster (TAN) in the seas; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their rivers."
- Job 40:23 Though the river rage, he is unalarmed, confident that the Jordan will burst to his mouth.
- Ps. 22:9 Yet thou art he who burst me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts.
- Mic. 4:10 Writhe and burst, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now you shall go forth from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies

Here the beginning of all things is not presented as a "Let it be" or as a "creation" or as a "making." The passage, in mixing the waters of birth with the primordial waters of chaos, presents God more as a midwife, controlling the birth and letting things come forth in number and order.

7. As compared to verses 4 through 7, these verses, with words like "burst,"

“womb,” “cloth,” and “swaddle,” seem to mark a movement from the arts to those things which are older than the arts. This movement is in fact a movement from the masculine workman and his arts, which cause things to come to be by the application of measurement to a world outside of itself, and by the forceful fixing of pylons into something more solid than themselves.

It is a movement to another and older kind of coming to be, that brings forth measurelessly from within itself. Thus far, the movement seems tentative and ambiguous. The Voice presents itself as imposing its law upon the sea, and yet it also shows itself to possess the more feminine virtues of “clothing” and of “swaddling.” It does not speak of itself as “trampling on the tier of the sea,” but as finding a proper place for its “proud majesty.”

Another way of looking at the problem is to consider the distinction between a creating God and a nurturing God. Fundamental to this question is Aristotle’s statement: “Of the things that are, some are by nature, and some are by other causes,” the foremost of which is art. Aristotle implies that the discovery of nature essentially means that there is no conclusion to be drawn from the things that are made by man and hence rely upon man, concerning the things that are not manmade, but have within themselves their own source of motion and rest.

Here, too, the artisan God has within Himself the “to be” of the object. He shapes and molds according to His plan, while the more feminine, nurturing God we meet in the Book of Job allows for the emergence of the “to be,” which is in the thing itself.

8. Winnowing is a strange and interesting process. There is the wheat, which one wants because it is good, and there is the chaff, which one does not want because it is not good; but there they lie all mixed up together. One’s first inclination would be to pick out the chaff, chaff by chaff. Winnowing, though, is a very different process and calls for another kind of spirit. In winnowing, the whole is tossed lightly in a blanket. The wind carries off the chaff, or most of it, and the wheat, because it is more stable and weighty, tumbles safely back into the blanket. The farmer rejoices with his flour though he knows that in spite of all his care, a bit of chaff may have gotten through, and a grain or two of wheat may have fallen to the ground.

9. If one looks at the way the author uses the word for clay, one can see that it is beginning to be used quite generally as the dead medium out of which and into which we come and go. In that sense, it takes on something of what we call “matter,” or something like what Elihu means by the “nebula.”

- Job 4:19 what of those who dwell in a house of clay, whose foundation is but dust? He will crush them like a moth.
- Job 10:9 Remember that You made me as clay and that You will return me to dust.
- Job 13:12 Your aphorisms are proverbs of ash, your bulwarks, bulwarks of clay.

- Job 27:16 If he should pile up silver like dust, and lay out his clothing as if it were clay,
Job 30:19 It throws me into the mire and I become like dust and ashes.
Job 33:6 Here I am, just as you wished, standing in for God, though I too was nipped from clay.

While the imagery of clay often appears in the other books of the Bible, especially in Isaiah and Jeremiah, in them man is constantly likened to the clay itself, whereas in this speech he is like the object made of clay bearing a seal or signet. The implication is that a man, like the pot, but unlike the clay, has his own shape, his own “to be.”

- Isa. 45:9 Woe to him who strives with his Maker, an earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, “What are you making?” or “Your work has no handles?”
Isa. 64:8 Yet, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand.
Jer. 18:4 And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.
Jer. 18:6 O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? says the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

10. The single Hebrew word *hotam* which is here translated by the English phrase “stamped by a seal,” has a most interesting history, of which the reader should be aware. Originally, it meant “to stop up.”

- Lev. 15:3 And this is the law of his uncleanness for a discharge: whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is stopped from discharge, it is uncleanness in him.

From there it acquires a feeling of permanence and safety, either as a thing safe in itself, or as something safely out of the way.

- Job 24:16 In the dark he tunnels his way into houses which are sealed up tight against him by day, since he does not know the light.
Job 14:17 My transgression would be sealed up in a pouch and You would plaster over my perversions.

Then, in its nominal form, it comes to be used as a signet or seal placed by a king upon his letter.

- 1Kings 21:8 So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who dwelt with Naboth in his city.

In that sense, it marks a thing's character, and becomes a kind of guarantee that the object is what it is and will continue to be what it has become.

Esther 8:8 And you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring; for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked.

We have already seen the word going in that direction:

Job 33:16–18 He unveils the ears of mortals and places His seal upon their discipline, to turn man (*'adam*) away from action and conceal pride from the man (*geb_her*). He will keep his soul back from the pit and his life from perishing by the sword.

There are two Hebrew words for the English word “seal” or “signet ring.” One is our word *hotam*; the other is *tabba'at^h*. It comes from the Biblical root *tb'*, which means “to dip.” Hence *teb^ha't^h* becomes the word for a signet ring, or that which is “dipped” into the wax to give the seal its form. This second word eventually became the taking-off place for the postbiblical word *teb^ha'*, used to translate the Greek word *physis*, or “nature.” It is interesting to note that of the two words, the tradition chose the root which emphasizes the fact that the mark is impressed upon the object from the outside. The author of Job, on the other hand, chooses the one which emphasizes the guaranteed character of the object itself.

The suggestion is that for our author, the word *hotam* is beginning to acquire the character of the Greek word *physis* or “nature.”

11. Again the author chooses a very forceful word. In biblical Hebrew the root is used only in the reflexive mood. Even at its weakest, it means “to present one's self” or “to stand firm,” in the sense of being fully present. It can also be used to mean “to take a stand,” in the sense of taking full responsibility for one's actions. A full list of the other occurrences in the Book of Job should be of help:

Job 1:6	One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves
Job 2:1	One day the Sons of GOD came to present themselves
Job 33:5	Lay your case out before me and take your stand.
Job 41:10	No one is so brutal as to rouse him up. Now, who is that one who would stand before me?

There is also an interesting series of uses in Exodus which may be of some help.

- Exod. 9:13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let my people go, that they may serve me."'"
- Exod. 14:13 And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again."
- Exod. 19:17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.
- Exod. 34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

12. The argument seems to be that if a white garment has been dyed red, and the dye stands firm or has been well fixed, then the garment has truly become a red garment. The red color is as much a part of the object in front of me as anything else. It would be wrong of me to think of the white garment as the truth lying behind the red garment.

In the same way, the clay cannot be considered to be the truth behind the pot. The seal, or mark, or character has transformed the clay into a pot, and a pot it now is.

The chaff of our former example can be separated from the wheat precisely because the character of the chaff is different from the character of the wheat. It is this difference in their own characters that causes the separation in spite of the fact that they are both tossed with the same force and blown by the same wind.

The argument as a whole is intended as a reply to Elihu. The world beyond man, the realm of the Jackal, as it is, considered in itself and by the human eye, may not be reducible to the nebulae. The beings in it may each have their own being and hence their own strivings and ambitions apart from any human concern, yet man may be open to them.

13. Job had once said:

Job 7:12 Am I the sea or some monster that You set watch over me?

He is now being asked to face that sea.

14. I have tried to catch the rather strange concatenation of the foreboding character of the object and the relaxed, inviting character of the verb. It is in the reflexive form and so carries with it a sense of aimless freedom and intended joy. When it is used to describe God "going for a walk" in the Garden, one immediately senses that He has not come for the sake of checking up on Adam and Eve. It can, of course, be used with great irony.

Job 1:7 and 2.1 "Oh," said the Satan to THE LORD "wandering around Earth, just went down there to go for a walk."

- Job 18:7–8 His plans will trip him up, for his own feet will lead him into a net, and he will walk himself right into the trap.
- Job 22:14 ‘Clouds obscure Him and He can see nothing as He strolls round the circuit of heaven.’

It is as if the Voice were trying to seduce Job into that frightful and forbidden world beyond the world of man.

15. Those that have always been shunned by man:

- Ps. 9:13 Be gracious to me, O LORD! Behold what I suffer from those who hate me, O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death,
- Ps. 107:18 they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

16. The Shadow of Death; the tradition has connected it with “the Place of the Jackal.”

- Ps. 44:18 Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from thy way, that thou shouldst have broken us in the place of jackals, and covered us with the Shadow of Death.

It has been in the air now for a long time now. Job first saw it as a kind of horrid haven of things unwanted, the dark and dangerous place to which Job had consigned the day of his birth with his first words.

- Job 3:1–8 Then, Job opened his mouth and spurned his day. Job answered and said “May the day of my birth be lost in oblivion and with it that night in which it was said ‘A MAN (*GEB_HER*) has been conceived.’ May that day be a day of darkness. May God from on high not seek it out nor any brightness radiate upon it; but let darkness and the Shadow of Death redeem it, and may a cloud dwell above it. May that which warms the day terrify it. Let the murk consume that night that it not be counted among the days of the year or enter into the number of its months. Thus shall that night become hard and sterile with no sound of joy in it. Those who despise the sea, and those who are determined to lay open the Leviathan will curse it.

And now Job is invited to drop in for a visit.

When he enters, that day will be there waiting for him, and in it he will learn much about birth and conception, and as we know from the first words that came out of the Tempest, his main goal will be to become that man (*geb_her*) who had been conceived so long ago.

Death and the fear of death are central to the theme of the book, and, as we shall see, the remainder of Job’s education is nothing more than a stroll down by its gates.

Perhaps nothing of what is can be so transformed or disfigured and contorted as the face of death as it steps through the curtain drawn between the world of man and the world of nature. The commonplace becomes the terrifying, and it is not clear that either is the truth behind the other. Which is the face and which is the mask?

17. Job must learn to peer beyond the borders of the light and into the place of darkness. The monsters of the dark cannot be kept out by hiding in a cave, as Elihu had suggested. They will wander and must be gently escorted home by one who knows the way.

18. Some take this verse to be intended sarcastically, but that need not be the case. The voice may be reminding Job of some deep-seated kinship he has with an antique whole.

19. In their own home, the monsters have a role to play.

20. This passage is much more cleverly crafted than I have been able to capture in the English translation. The three verbs, “dispersed,” “cast about,” and “cleaved,” all mean the same thing, “to divide into parts”; but the first is a very gentle word, and then there is a clear progression to the last, which is quite a violent word. Similarly, there is the motion from light to wind to flooding torrent, and, finally, we are at a loss to know what it takes to “make a pathway for the voice of the thunder.”

God begins Job’s education by showing him the forces that were needed to bring the inanimate world into being. They are only a part of the forces which he has “laid aside for a time of narrowness and for the days of battle and of war.” In this account more seems to be required than a “let there be. . . ”

21. man (*‘adam*)

22. This is the thing that Elihu could not understand: a budding field which is for its own sake and not for the sake of man, but for all that it may be the more beautiful to Job.

23. Again, as we caught our first glimpse in verse 8, male and female origins are beginning to play an equal role in the foundation of all things. This stance which comes out of the *Tempest* is unique to the Book of Job. In rhetoric and imagery, the closest book in the Bible to the Book of Job is the Book of Psalms; and yet, even there, if one considers the complete list of references to bellies and wombs in it, one sees that, in contradistinction to the Book of Job, the female is always somewhat subordinate:

Ps. 17:14 from mortals—by your hand, O LORD—from mortals whose portion in life is in this world. May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them; may their children have more than enough; may they leave something over to their little ones.

Ps. 22:9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

Ps. 22:10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

- Ps. 31:9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.
- Ps. 58:3 The wicked go astray from the womb; they err from their birth, speaking lies.
- Ps. 71:6 Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.
- Ps. 110:3 Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you.
- Ps. 127:3 Sons are indeed a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.
- Ps. 139:13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

24. The double use of the reflexive even gives the water a certain amount of autonomy. Its reaction is something it does to itself.

25. The exact meaning of this word is not known, but it seems to be the name of one of the constellations.

26. This expression only occurs in one other passage in the Bible and does not seem to have the same force that it acquires in this one:

- Jer. 33:24f. Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the LAWS OF HEAVEN and earth; Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.

27. Men were always aware of a world beyond their reach that sparkled over their heads each night while all other things slept. Its vastness and untouchability were awesome. It moved according to its own paths, and no man could stir it or change its course.

Yet God's question to Job would have been banal unless Job were being asked to face those well-known, everyday facts in a way in which no man ever had. If Job is to step beyond the limits of man, and into the realm of his brotherhood with the Jackal, as he will surely do in the chapters which follow, those banal facts, and others, must be faced again.

In the Book of Genesis, the sun, moon, and stars were to be regarded as little more than the servants of man, given to him by an all-loving God "to separate the day from the night"; and "to be for signs and for seasons and for days and years." But Job is being faced with something called "the Laws of the Heaven." The Mazzaroth comes out in its own time, indifferent to good times and to bad

times, to times of war, and to times of peace. To some that would have signified an unbearably cold indifference in the stars to human affairs. Not to see it as twinkling for us, but to allow it to twinkle for itself was Job's first lesson.

28. Job must be prepared not only for a world whose inhabitants have ends and ways of their own unrelated to man. There will also be those that strike of a sudden as if they had intention without purpose and were ready to go, but took no aim.

The full force which inheres in the word translated "Here am I," can only be felt by reminding ourselves of the conditions under which they have been used:

- Gen. 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, Here am I.
- Gen. 22:7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?
- Gen. 22:11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.
- Gen. 27:1 And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, Here am I.
- Gen. 27:18 And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son?
- Gen. 31:11 And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I.
- Gen. 37:13 And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I.
- Gen. 46: 2 And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.
- Exod. 3:4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.
- 1Sam. 3:4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again.
- 1Sam. 3:8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.
- 1Sam 3:16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.
- 1Sam. 12:3f. Behold, Here am I: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I

taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.

1Sam. 22:12 And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here am I, my lord.

2Sam. 1:7 And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, am I an Amalekite. And he said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me.

2Sam. 15:26 But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, Here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.

29. The meaning of the text is obscure. Greenberg translates: "Who put wisdom in the hidden parts? Who gave understanding to the mind?" The Revised Standard translates: "Who put wisdom in the clouds? or given understanding to the mist? King James translates: "Who put wisdom in the inward parts? Who gave understanding to the heart?"

The first problem is with the word *b^etuhot^h*. It is almost a hopax legominon (a word that appears only once in the whole of the known literature) and no one is quite sure what it means. All seem to agree that it comes from the root *twh* "to overlay," "overspread," etc., rather from *t^hh*, "to secure," and that the *b^e* means "in." So far as I can dope it out, the problem surrounds the *u*-type vocalic mode of the *tu*. Is it a shred of the *w* which had been part of the root? If so we have a noun related to the act of covering. For reasons which we will come to see later, the Revised Standard takes the "coverer" to be a cloud. But the *u* might be a sign of the passive instead. In that case, we are not dealing with a "covering" thing, but with a "covered" or "hidden" thing. In fact, the word also appears in Psalm 51:8 (RS 51:6), where even the Revised Standard translates: "thou desirest truth in the inward being." To push the argument further, we must look at the other problematic word, *l^eshichwai*.

This time we do have a true hopax legominon; and so we must go fishing. The semitic root *skh* or *skh* in Aramaic means "to watch," in the sense of doing what a watchman does. In Syriac it means "to hope," and in Arabic "to complain."

In connection with this sense of "watching," there is a tradition which I have not been able to track down that relates it to a celestial appearance. Hence the Revised Standard translates: "mist." This, I presume, is what led to the translation of *tahot* as "cloud."

Gersonides has another tradition which relates it more to the act of seeing. This would account for such translations as "mind" or "heart." This is particularly interesting in the case of the King James translators, since they obviously took it as rhetorically parallel to "inward part."

As part of this argument, there is another and more common word from the

same root, *maskit*, which can indeed mean “imagination,” but which more often means a “carved figure” or an “image”; hence my translation.

The relation between inner and outward intelligibility is, of course, central for the Book of Job.

30. If Job can gird his loins and stand before all these things, he will see these fearful forces, all in delicate balance, each a part of that with which it seemed at war.