

JOB

Introduction

The book of Job is drama with little action and a lot of passion. It brings forward the passion that a great, unresigned writer has portrayed in the main character of the book. Uneasy with the traditional doctrine about retribution, he opposed a concrete fact to a principle.

Our author brings his case to the extreme: he makes the innocent protagonist suffer so that his cry would come "from the depth."

The action is very simple: Job's friends defend God's justice as an impartial judge that rewards the good ones and punishes the bad ones. Job is not interested in this kind of justice by God because his own experience tells him otherwise. To prove his innocence to God, Job risks his own life. God, as the final judge, gives the final answer to Job and his friends. While being challenged, God answers and questions Job to lead him towards the mystery of God.

Through the dialogues, of a good conventional man, that gives thanks to God because everything goes well for him, comes a deep man, capable of assuming and representing the sorrowful humanity that searches God with audacity.

The book of Job is an especially modern book; it is provocative, not apt for conformists. It is difficult to read it without being challenged and it is difficult to understand it unless one takes sides.

Prologue on earth

1 ¹Job, a blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil, once lived in the land of Uz. ²He had seven sons and three daughters. ³Owner of seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and a large number of servants, he was considered the greatest man among the people of the East.

⁴His sons used to take turns holding banquets in their homes and they would invite their three sisters to dine and drink with them.

Prologue in heaven

⁶One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before Yahweh, and Satan came with them. ⁷Yahweh asked Satan:

—Where have you been?

Satan answered:

—Going up and down the earth, roaming about.

⁸Yahweh asked again:

—Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as blameless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil.

⁹But Satan returned the question:

—Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰Have you not built a protective wall around him and his family and all his possessions? You have blessed and prospered him, with his livestock all over

the land. ¹¹But stretch out your hand and strike where his riches are, and I bet he will curse you to your face.

¹²Yahweh said to Satan:

—Very well, all that he has is in your power. But do not lay a finger upon the man himself. So Satan left the presence of Yahweh.

Job's trials

¹³One day, while his sons and daughters were feasting in the house of their eldest brother, ^{14a}a messenger came to Job and said:

—Your oxen were plowing, and your donkeys were grazing nearby ¹⁵when the Sabaeans came and carried them off. They killed the herdsmen. I alone escaped to tell you.

¹⁶While he was still speaking, another messenger came:

—God's fire fell from the sky and burned all your sheep and the shepherds as well. I alone have escaped to tell you.

¹⁷He had hardly finished speaking when another messenger arrived:

—Three raiding teams of Chaldeans have killed your servants and carried off your camels. I alone have escaped to tell you.

¹⁸He was still speaking when another messenger came and said to Job:

—Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking in the house of their eldest brother ¹⁹when suddenly a great wind blew across the desert and struck the house. It collapsed on the young people and they all died. I alone have escaped to tell you.

²⁰In grief Job tore his clothes and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground and worshiped, ²¹saying:

—Naked I came from my mother's womb,
naked shall I return.

Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken away.

Blessed be his name!

²²In spite of this calamity, Job did not sin by blaspheming God.

2 ¹Once more the heavenly beings came to present themselves before Yahweh, and again Satan was with them. ²Yahweh asked Satan:

—Where have you been?

Satan answered:

—Going up and down the earth, roaming about.

³Yahweh asked again:

—Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as blameless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil. He still holds fast to his integrity even if you provoked me to ruin him without cause.

⁴Satan replied:

—Skin for skin! For his own life, anyone will give everything he owns. ⁵But lay your hand against his own flesh and bones and he will curse you to your face.

⁶Yahweh said to Satan:

—Very well, he is in your power. But spare his life.

⁷So Satan left the presence of Yahweh and afflicted Job with festering sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸Job took a potsherd to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

⁹His wife said to him:

—Do you still hold on to your integrity? Curse God and die!

¹⁰Job replied:

—You talk foolishly. If we receive good things from God, why can't we accept evil from him?

In spite of this calamity, Job did not utter a sinful word.

Job's friends

¹¹Three of Job's friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—heard of the misfortune that came upon him. They set out from their own homes and journeyed together to offer their sympathy and consolation to Job. ¹²Failing to recognize him from the distance, they wept aloud, tore their garments and poured dust upon their heads. ¹³For seven days and seven nights, they sat on the ground beside him. They did not say a word to Job, for they saw how terribly he suffered.

3 ¹At length it was Job who spoke, cursing the day of his birth. ²This is what he said:

³—Cursed be the day I was born,
and the night which whispered:

A boy has been conceived.

⁵For what I fear has come upon me,
what I dread has befallen me.

⁶I find no rest, I find no ease;
only turmoil, nothing of peace!

4 ¹Eliphaz the Temanite spoke next:

⁶—Should you not rely on your piety,
and find assurance in your integrity?

⁷Have you seen a guiltless man perish,
or an upright man done away with?

⁸As I see it, those who plow evil
or those who sow trouble reap the same.

¹⁷Can a mortal be just in the eyes of God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?

5 ⁸If I were you, I would appeal to God
and lay before him my case,

for wonders are past all reckoning,
his miracles beyond all counting.

10 He pours rain down on the earth
and sends water upon the fields.
11 He sets the lowly on high,
turns grief into joy.
17 Blessed is the one whom God corrects;
reject not, therefore, the lessons of the Almighty,
18 He cures the wounds he has inflicted;
he strikes but he also heals.
19 From six troubles he will rescue you;
at the seventh no harm will touch you.
20 In famine he saves you from death;
in war, from the threat of the sword.
21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue,
and have no dread of marauding bands.
27 This we have examined and found true.
This we have heard, and you should know.

7 ¹Job replied:
—Man's life on earth is a thankless job,
his days are those of a mercenary.
²Like a slave he longs for the shade of evening,
like a hireling waiting for his wages.
³Thus I am allotted months of boredom
and nights of grief and misery.
⁴In bed I say, "When shall the day break?"
On rising, I think, "When shall evening come?"
and I toss restless till dawn.
⁵My body is full of worms and scabs;
my skin festers with its boils and cracks.
⁶My days pass swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
heading without hope to their end.
⁷My life is like wind, you well know it,
O God; never will I see happiness again.

10 ¹Since I loathe my life,
I shall pour forth my complaint;
I shall speak of my soul's torment.
²I shall say to God: Do not condemn me,
but tell me what is your quarrel with me?

29 ¹Job continued his discourse:
²—Oh, that I were in months gone by,
in the days when God watched over me,
³when his light shone upon my head
and I walked with it through darkness.
⁴Oh, that I were in my prime,
when God's friendship blessed my home,
⁵when the Almighty was still with me

and my children were around me!

32 ¹The three men made no further reply to Job, because in their opinion, he was guiltless. ²But Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry with Job for justifying himself before God. ³He was also angry with the three friends for their failure to refute Job, because they had allowed God to be condemned.

38 ¹Then Yahweh answered Job out of the storm:

²—Who is this that obscures divine plans
with ignorant words?

³Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you and you must answer.

⁴Where were you when I founded the earth?

Answer, and show me your knowledge.

⁵Do you know who determined its size,
who stretched out its measuring line?

⁶On what were its bases set?

Who laid its cornerstone,

⁷while the morning stars sang together
and the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

⁸Who shut the sea behind closed doors
when it burst forth from the womb,

⁹when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling clothes;

¹⁰when I set its limits

with doors and bars in place,

¹¹when I said, “You will not go beyond these bounds;
here is where your proud waves must halt?”

¹²Have you ever commanded the morning,
or shown the dawn its place,

¹³that it might grasp the earth by its edges
and shake the wicked out of it,

¹⁴when it takes a clay color
and changes its tint like a garment;

¹⁵when the wicked are denied their own light,
and their proud arm is shattered?

¹⁶Have you journeyed to where the sea begins
or walked in its deepest recesses?

¹⁷Have the gates of death been shown to you?
Have you seen the gates of Shadow?

¹⁸Have you an idea of the breadth of the earth?
Tell me, if you know all this.

¹⁹Where is the way to the home of light,
and where does darkness dwell?

²⁰Can you take them to their own regions,
and set them on their homeward paths?

²¹You know, for you were born before them,
and great is the number of your years!

22 Have you entered the storehouse of the snow
or seen the storehouse of the hail,
23 which I reserve for times of woe,
for days of war and battle?
24 What is the way to the place
where lightning is dispersed,
or the place whence the east wind
begins spreading over the earth?
25 Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a path for the thunderstorm,
26 to bring rain to no-man's-land
and to the unpeopled wilderness,
27 to enrich the wasted and desolate ground,
to make the desert bloom with green?
28 Does the rain have a father?
Who fathers the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb comes the ice,
and who gives birth to the frost from the skies,
30 when the waters lie as hard as stone,
when the surface of the deep is frozen?
31 Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loosen the bonds of Orion?
32 Can you guide the morning star in its season,
or lead the Bear with its train?
33 Do you know the laws of the heavens,
and can you establish their rule on earth?
34 Can you raise your voice to the clouds
and order their waters to pour down?
35 Will lightnings flash at your command
and report to you, "Here we are?"
36 Who has given the ibis foresight
or endowed the cock with foreknowledge?
37 Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?
Who tilts the water jars of heaven
38 so that the dust cakes into a mass
and clods of earth stick together?
39 Can you hunt the woods to appease
the hunger of the lioness and her whelps,
40 as they crouch in their dens
or lie in wait in the thicket?
41 Who provides prey for the raven
when its young cry out to God
and roam about desperate for food?

40 ¹Yahweh said to Job:

²—Must a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?

Let him who would correct God answer.

³Job said:

⁴—How can I reply, unworthy as I am!

All I can do is put my hand over my mouth.
⁵I have spoken once, now I will not answer;
Oh, yes, twice, but I will do no further.

42 ¹This was the answer Job gave to Yahweh:

²—I know that you are all powerful;
no plan of yours can be thwarted.

^{3b}I spoke of things I did not understand,
too wonderful for me to know.

⁵My ears had heard of you,
but now my eyes have seen you.

⁶Therefore I retract all I have said,
and in dust and ashes I repent.

¹²Yahweh blessed Job's latter days much more than his earlier ones. He came to own fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-donkeys.

¹³He was also blessed with seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴The first daughter he named Dove, the second Cinnamon, and the third Bottle of Perfume. ¹⁵Nowhere in the land was there found any woman who could compare in beauty with Job's daughters. Their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

¹⁶Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. ¹⁷He died old and full of years.