Number 12, April 2004

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Stromata

♦ Things Happening (1)

On March 1st and 2nd Prof. Elenore Stump of St. Louis University, presented two Theology Forum Lectures; one titled Job: Second Person Accounts and the Problem of Suffering, and the other titled Evil and Faith: Abraham Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael. Michael Levine, a visitor to the University of Colorado Humanities department presented a lecture titled Philosophy of Religion: Dead in the Water. Dr. Arnold Guminski presented a talk on April 6th, The Moral Argument for God’s Existence: Natural Moral Law and Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism. Prof. Diane Mayer continues to teach the Theology Forum Seminar on Liberation Theology. In April, the Seminar will have guests Paul Strom and Priscilla Inkpen. Prof. Claudia Mills will teach the Seminar next fall. Stay tuned for a topic.
Things Happening (2)

The Theology Forum plans to host a conference to be held October 21-23. The topic will be “The Divine Hiddenness”, the speakers will include John Schellenberg, Stephen Evans, and Daniel Howard-Snyder. Stay tuned for more details and a possibly a call for papers.

New Website

The forum has recently designed a new website. It will feature a new multimedia section containing both audio files from guest speakers and pictures of events. Check the website to stay up to date of what’s happening in the forum. Check it out at www.TheologyForum.net

We’re All Yahoos

The widely current word yahoo, which refers to a brutal or repulsive person, derives from the fourth of and last voyage of Gulliver’s Travels. In it, Gulliver lands in a country made up of two races-horses, which are eminently reasonable and kind, and horrible human beings named Yahoos, who enjoy doing wicked, ugly acts. Thus our current use of the word.

But author Jonathan Swift implied a more profound, ironic meaning. We learn in Genesis 1:16 that God “made human-kind in our image, according to our likeness.” Thus for swift, we are Yahoos created in God’s image; and look at the brutal repulsive deeds we do. Our name is the anglicized form of Yahu in the list of God’s names given by Bernhard Lang in “Why God Has So Many Names” (August 2003). It is an alternative spelling and pronunciation of Yahweh, the most frequently used name for the Old Testament God. (Published in the December 2003 issue of Bible Review, Submitted by William Hunter of Greensboro, North Carolina.)

Snarly Comments

Warning, snarly comment follows. You can go to the movies and see most anything you want. People are murdered, brutalized, and tortured. Burned, raped, decapitated. Maimed, drowned, emasculated and starved. Now you can see for yourself, upfront and personal, what it was like to be crucified, alá Mel Gibson. The genre of suffering and martyrdom was well established by the time of the Maccabees, about 167 B.C.
It includes blood-curdling, stories about the aged and scholarly Eleazar, the Seven Brothers, and their mother, in the apocryphal books of 2 Macc. and 4 Macc., composed during the first half of the first century B.C. But nobody objects to this literature. How is it that, for some, the story of Jesus’ Passion, certifiably true in its substance, now brings down the house with a barrage of criticism? Can it be ignored that, for better or worse, the unarguably, most pivotal figure of western history was Jesus Christ? Setting aside theological questions, it should be a question of historiography, and only that. Otherwise, “Methinks thou dost protest too much.” (ELM)

Why do the righteous suffer?

Wes Morriston

“You have heard of the patience of Job,” says the New Testament book of James. Indeed we have. “Be true to God,” we’re told, “and he will be true to you.” “Things may look bad for a while, but God always takes care of his own.” Just look at the way God restored Job’s fortunes, giving him double the wealth he had before he lost everything.

Unfortunately for this interpretation of the book of Job, the patient Job disappears at the beginning chapter three. In his place, we encounter a decidedly impatient Job – a Job who screams in pain and accuses God of treating him unfairly. Three “friends” add to his misery by arguing that Job must surely deserve everything that has happened to him. Eventually God “answers” Job from the whirlwind, but the God’s “answer” says nothing about what has happened to Job!

Some readers find the book of Job tough going, and a few even fail to see just how strongly Job challenges God. What I’ve written here – part
paraphrase, part quotation – is dedicated to them. I hope it will inspire them to go back the book of Job and struggle with the issue that troubled its author so deeply – Why do the righteous suffer?

**Job screams in pain (Chapter 3)**

God damn the day I was born! It hurts so much, I wish I were dead.

The first cycle of speeches Chapters 4 - 14

**Eliphaz begins. (Chapters 4 – 5)**

Mind if I say a word? Have you forgotten how you used to counsel folks who were hurting?

Take heart, man. God hasn't forgotten you. Do the innocent ever perish? No way. A man reaps what he sows. It's only the wicked who are cut down.

(To himself: But here's scary thought that came to me last night in a dream... Maybe none of us are any good. If God finds fault with the angels, how much more fault will he find in mortals made of dust like ourselves?)

So my advice to you, Job, is to seek God and commit yourself to him. He's in charge of the whole show, after all. He rules the world with absolute justice, giving hope to the poor and needy, and foiling the schemes of the wicked. If you humble yourself before God, you'll be safe in his hands.

There is also this to think about. God sometimes chastens us. But it's always for our own good, and the misfortune is temporary. Things may look bad at the moment, but God will restore your fortunes. You'll have lots of [new?] children, and you'll live to a ripe old age. If you are true to God, he will be true to you.

These, Job, are the facts. Pay attention.

**Job replies. (Chapters 6 – 7)**
Which part of this don’t you get? Don’t you see how great my suffering is? I wish God would just finish the job and kill me outright.

How can I be patient? I’m only human, after all. After what’s happened to me, what can I hope for?

My so-called “friends” merely add insult to injury. I ask for a little sympathy, and all they have to offer is veiled criticism and a bunch of stale proverbs.

The truth is that life is a bitch, and then you die. At night, God scares you with terrible dreams. When the end comes, you go down to the place of the dead, never to return.

It’s hard to understand why God gives us such a hard time. We’re all so small and insignificant in comparison to him.

So why are you picking on me, God? Even if I have slipped up here or there, why not just let it go? Won’t you look away for a bit, and give me a chance to swallow my own spit? (7:19)

Pretty soon, I’ll be dead, and you won’t have Job to kick around any more.

Bildad’s speech. (Chapter 8)

Look here, you bag of wind. God doesn’t pervert justice. (v. 3) Those children you’re grieving for? They must have been really big-time sinners. (v. 4)

As for you, if you really are as pure and upright as you say, then seek God, and he will restore your fortunes. (vv. 5-7)

Pay attention to the wisdom of the ages. It tells us that the wicked perish, and that “God will not reject a blameless man.” (8:20)

Job replies. (Chapters 9 – 10)
One of you said that no man can be just before God.\(^1\) In one sense this is true. No man can contend with God. He’s just too damned powerful. If he wants to knock over a mountain, that mountain is gone. If he tells the sun not to rise, then darkness covers the face of the earth. Who can say to him, “What are you doing?” He’s so powerful, that no one can call him to account. He can put anyone in the wrong, no matter how carefully they have followed his precepts. No one can count on getting justice from God.

If you don’t believe it, then look at what’s happened to me. I, Job, am exhibit A in the case against God. What’s happened to me proves that the Almighty makes no distinction between the innocent and the guilty. He condemns the blameless man and laughs at his suffering. If he decides you a “guilty,” it doesn’t matter how innocent you are.

*Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;*  
*though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.*

In a way, of course, God is impartial. He destroys both the blameless and the wicked. But that only goes to show that life under God is *not fair*. The poor and the outcast can’t get a fair hearing because he “covers the eyes of the judges.” When a disaster “brings sudden death,” he “mocks at the calamity of the innocent.”\(^2\)

You know what I wish? I wish there were some sort of “Umpire” who could mediate my dispute with God. But I know that’s impossible, because God is too powerful. Even if we could reach a fair settlement of my case, no one could compel him to abide by the terms of the agreement. Only God himself can “deliver me out of [God’s] hand.” (10:7b)

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\(^1\) When Job asks, “how can a man be just before God?” (9:2) he is not joining the friends in suggesting that we are all blameworthy. As the following verses make clear, God’s unlimited power makes it impossible for any man to get justice from God. If God wants to put a man in the wrong, then that man is – in a very public way – *in the wrong* with God. This – alas – is what has happened to Job.

\(^2\) *It is all one; therefore I say,*  
*He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.*  
*When disaster brings sudden death,*  
*He mocks at the calamity of the innocent.*  
*The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;*  
*he covers the eyes of its judges—*  
*If it is not he, who then is it?* (9:15-24)
If only God would take his rod off my back for a moment. Then I could speak without fear, telling him what’s in my heart. I know – I would make him know – that I am not the criminal my friends have made me out to be.

Please, God. Remember that you are the one who made me. You know as well as I do that I am not guilty of any great sin. (10:7a) If you intended to treat me like this, “why did you bring me forth from the womb?”

If this is what you had in mind for me, then I wish I had never been born! I’ll be dead soon enough. So let me alone for a bit, God, “that I may find a little comfort” before I go.3

Zophar’s speech (Chapter 11)

Babble, babble. You should be ashamed of yourself, Job. You say you are innocent. But the truth is that God “exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.” (11:6b) I wish God would set you straight on that point.

What do you know about the “deep things of God?” (11:7) He knows who’s done what, and who deserves punishment. You, my loquacious friend, are no exception.

There’s not much point in talking to you, though.

A stupid person will get understanding,
When a wild ass is born human. (10:12)

Still, if you should see the error of your ways and repent, God will forgive you and restore your fortunes.

You will forget your misery;
You will remember it as waters that have passed away.

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3 Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort
before I go, never to return,
to the land of gloom and deep darkness,
the land of gloom and chaos,
where light is like darkness. (10:20-22)
And your life will be brighter than the noonday;  
Its darkness will be like the morning.  (10:16-17)

But if you don’t repent, you will share the fate of the wicked.

The eyes of the wicked will fail;  
all way of escape will be lost to them,  
and their hope is to breathe their last.  (11:20)

Job replies (Chapters 12 – 14)

Smart asses! I suppose you think wisdom will die with you. But you’ve missed what ought to be obvious to everyone. Instead of looking around to you to see for yourselves how God governs the world, you rely on traditional maxims and proverbs and wise saws.

Your blind adherence to tradition makes you speak falsely about me – putting me in the wrong so that you can put God in the right. Just wait until it’s your turn to feel his wrath on your necks! I wonder if you’ll enjoy having those same proverbs applied to you!

I tell you that “Your maxims are proverbs of ashes, your defenses are defenses of clay.” (13:12) They crumble at the slightest contact with reality. And here is the proof. I, Job, was and am a “just and blameless man” – a pillar of the community. And yet I have been singled out for punishment, while the “tents of robbers are at peace.” (12:4,6)

You say that God is intelligent and powerful. I have never denied it. He raises up nations and then destroys them, he overthrows the mighty and makes the leaders of the earth stupid.

They grope in the dark, without light;  
he makes them stagger like a drunkard.  (12:25)

Even so, I’d like a chance to speak to God. I want to “argue my case” with him. (13:3)

Yep, that’s what I’m going to do. It may be hopeless, but I am going to demand justice from God. I will get right in his face and defend myself.
Don’t bother telling me to shut up, because I won’t!

Let me have silence, and I will speak,  
And let come on me what may.  
I will take my flesh in my teeth,  
And put my life in my hand.  
See, he will kill me; I have no hope;  
But I will defend my ways to his face.  (13:13-16)\(^4\)

Did I say my case was hopeless? Maybe that was a mistake. God must know that a wicked person wouldn’t dare to do what I am about to do. When he hears my defense, he will surely he will vindicate me. (13:16,18)

Answer me, then, God! What, exactly, is it that I am supposed to be guilty of?

[Imagine Job listening for a moment, while God remains silent.]

Why, God? Why won’t you speak?

Why do you hide your face,  
And count me as your enemy?  
Will you frighten a windblown leaf  
And pursue dry chaff?  (13:24-5)

Why do you bother with me? I’m only a tiny creature that “comes up like a flower” but soon “withers.” (14:2,3) (Even if I did sow a few wild oats as a young man, is it worth punishing me for that now?)

The fact is that there is more hope for a tree than for a man. A tree puts out shoots. Even if you cut it down, it springs up again. But a man lies down and does not rise again.

Until the heavens are no more, they will not awake  
Or be roused out of their sleep.  (14:12)

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\(^4\) The last two lines used to be translated, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” They were then quoted out of context as a way of documenting the traditional picture of Job as a patient sufferer.
God, I wish you would just let me hang out in the underworld until your anger has run its course. Eventually, you might find yourself longing for me – for “the work of your hands.” You would call, and I would answer. Then you would take me out of the Pit, and forgive whatever wrong I have done.

My transgression would be sealed up in a bag,
And you would cover over my iniquity. (14:17)

Alas, I know only too well that this is just a pipedream. God will do nothing of the sort. Once he makes up his mind to crush a man, there is no hope for that man.

The mountain falls and crumbles away,
and the rock is removed from its place;
The waters wear away the stones;
the torrents wash away the soil of the earth;
so you destroy the hope of men. (14:18-19)

The second cycle of speeches (Chapters 15 – 21)

Eliphaz begins. (Chapter 15)

Now you’ve done it, Job. You’ve convicted yourself out of your own mouth. Just look at the way you’ve been talking about God!

You are doing away with the fear of God,
and hindering meditation before God.
Your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you. (15:4-6)

What do you know that we don’t know? (v. 9) Have you “listened in” when God was speaking? (v. 8) Why aren’t godly and gentle words of consolation we have spoken good enough for you? (v. 11) You’ve gotten completely carried away. Grief has deprived you of good sense. Your eyes flash, and your spirit “turns against God.” (vv. 12-13)
Remember who and what you are, Job. No mere human being can be “clean” enough to contend against Almighty God.

What are men, that they can be clean?
or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?
God puts no trust even in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not clean in his sight;
how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
one who drinks iniquity like water! (vv. 14-16)

Give over, and listen to what the sages have always said. It is the wicked who are punished. They “writhe in pain all their days…” (v. 20) “Terrifying sounds are in their ears …” (v. 21)

They are punished because, like you, “they stretched out their hands against God, and bid defiance to the Almighty.” (v. 25) Instead of humbling themselves before God and trusting in him, they trusted in emptiness. Therefore, “emptiness” will be their “recompense.” (v. 31)

Job replies. (Chapters 16 - 17)

What a miserable bunch of “comforters” you three have turned out to be. You talk on and on, shaking your heads at me, repeating dusty proverbs that I’ve known all my life. Why do you bother?

You should try putting yourself in my place. If these things had happened to you, how would you like it if I “comforted” you by saying that applying those same proverbs to you?

As for me, I don’t know whether to shut up or speak. Whether or not I keep it to myself, the pain of what has happened to me is unbearable. (16:6)

God has simply “worn me out.” (16:7)

*He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me;*
*He has gnashed his teeth at me…*
*I was at ease and he broke me in two;*
He seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
He set me up as his target;
His archers surround me.
He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy;
He pours out my gall on the ground.
He bursts upon me again and again;
He rushes at me like a warrior. (16:9,12-14)

And yet, “my prayer is pure” and “there is no violence in my hands.” (16:17) Let the earth itself be witness to my innocence and God’s injustice.

O earth, do not cover my blood;
Let my outcry find no resting place. (16:18)

“My eye pours our tears to God.” I ask for the right to challenge his governance of the universe. Just as my neighbor has a right to bring me to court if I fail to keep my side of a bargain, so I should have a right to bring God into court when he is not just in his dealings with me.

God himself is my Witness. He will surely vouch for me when the time comes.5

[ To the audience… ]

That was sheer bravado. The truth is that “my spirit is broken.” I have no hope, and I’m ready to die. (17:1)6

Bildad speaks (Chapter 18)

You must think we are stupid or something. Do you suppose that the moral order of the universe is going to be turned upside down for your sake?

As we’ve said… the wicked are punished, the wicked are punished, the wicked are punished.

5 An interpretation of a difficult verse: “Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high.” (16:19)

6 If I say to the Pit, ‘You are my father,’ and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ where then is my hope? (17:14-15)
Their roots dry up beneath,
and their branches wither above.
Their memory perishes from the earth,
and they have no name in the street.
They are thrust from light into darkness,
and driven out of the world.
They have no offspring or descendant among their people,
and no survivor where they used to live. (18:16-19)

Job answers. (Chapter 19)

How much longer will you torment me with your words? Even if I am mistaken, I hurt only myself. Why, then, do you continue to reproach me?

I know, I know... Things look bad for me. “God wouldn’t have ruined me if I were not a great sinner.” That’s what they all say.

Nobody will have anything to do with me now. My family and friends have turned against me. The guests in my own house have forgotten their host. The servants pay no attention when I call. My breath stinks. My wife can’t stand to be near me. My relatives are disgusted by my loathsome appearance. I am an embarrassment to them.

Why can’t you, the last of my friends, treat me with a bit of kindness? “Why do you, like God, pursue me?” Why do you keep on blaming the victim? Haven’t I suffered enough?

I cry out to God, complaining of the violence that has been done to me, but there is no answer. “I call aloud, but there is no justice.” (v. 7)

You know what I wish? I wish my words were written down in a really permanent way. Maybe with an “iron pen” and with “lead” – “engraved on a rock forever!” That way, long after I am gone, somebody could read them and vindicate me. My Vindicator would stand up for me. He would prove to everyone that I was in the right, and God was in the wrong.
No, I want something better even than that… I want God himself to be my Vindicator.7

For I know that my Vindicator8 lives,
And that at the last he9 will stand upon the earth10;
And after my skin has been thus destroyed
then in11 my flesh I shall see God12,
Whom I shall see on my side13,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another. (vv. 25-27)

Zophar answers (Chapter 20)

Listen up, Job!

Wickedness may be “sweet on the tongue,” but it will soon make you sick. (vv. 12ff) Those who crush the poor and swallow up their property will surely vomit it all back up. God’s wrath will surely overtake them.

Job answers. (Chapter 21)

Bear with me for a moment, my friends. When I have finished speaking, you can go right on mocking me.

My complaint is not addressed to a mere man. It is addressed to God – and it is about his conduct that I am complaining.

Your proverbs are refuted by the evidence of simple observation and experience. Open your eyes, and look around you! Those who forget God do prosper. As often as not, they are rich and powerful. They live on into old age. Their children and grandchildren flourish. Everything they touch turns to gold. And yet they are the ones who

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7 As sometimes happens in the speeches of Job, an expression of deepest despair and anguish is coupled with a moment of almost joyous hope.
8 Or Redeemer.
9 Or he the last.
10 Hebrew: dust
11 Or out of my flesh.
12 The text is generally thought to be corrupt, and the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.
13 Or for myself.
say to God, “Leave us alone! We do not desire to know your ways.” (v. 14)

Their behavior disgusts me as much as it disgusts you. (v. 16) But they do ask a good question.

**What is the almighty that we should serve him?**

*And what profit do we get if we pray to him?* (v. 15)

And the answer is, *no profit at all.* The truth is that you can ignore God and get away with it!

You say that God destroys the wicked. But I ask, “How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does calamity come upon them?” (v. 17) Tell me the truth, now. When did you last hear of anything like that happening?

Where have you been all your lives? Haven’t you at least spoken with travelers? Don’t they tell you that the wicked get away with it? That “the wicked are spared in the day of calamity?” (vv. 29ff) Face facts. Righteousness doesn’t pay. The God-despisers aren’t even taking a risk.

Please don’t misunderstand me. I am just as down as the wicked as you are. The wicked *should* be punished. The righteous *should* be rewarded. Life *should* be fair! But anybody who opens his eyes can see that it doesn’t work that way. When I think about it, I am utterly dismayed, and “shuddering seizes my flesh.” (v. 6)

You may say that God will punish their children and their children’s children. That is isn’t adequate. What do the wicked care for what happens after they’re gone? I want them to witness their own destruction. I want them to drink the wrath of the Almighty. (v. 20)

I want answers, and all you have given me is “empty nothings.” (v. 34)

**Third cycle of speeches** (Chapters 22 – 27)
Eliphaz (Chapter 22)

Let’s try this again. Why is God reproving you, if you don’t deserve it? Considering what’s happened to you, you must be a very bad person indeed. You must be the sort of person who exacts pledges from your relatives so that you can confiscate their property. The sort of person who strips the poor of their clothing. Who refuses to give the hungry anything to eat. (vv. 5-7)

You’re a positively Dickensian villain. You send widows away empty-handed, and exploit orphans. That must be why God is correcting you. (v. 9)

You thought God was high in the heavens and wouldn’t see. But God sees everything. It never pays to forget him. (vv. 13ff)

There’s still time to change your ways, Job. Return to the Almighty, humble yourself before him, and his light will shine upon you and give you peace. (vv. 23ff)

Job responds (Chapters 23 and 24:1-17, 21)

If only I knew where to find God. My case is so strong, I’m sure I could persuade him. “I would be acquitted forever by my judge.” (23:3-7)

Alas, God is nowhere to be found.

But even if I can’t find him, he must know the truth about me – that I have kept all of his commandments, that I have “treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth.” (vv. 11-12)

No, it’s hopeless. I can’t find God, and he won’t come to me. He has marked me for destruction, and nobody can stop him. I wish I could hide from God.

14 “Is not your wickedness great? There is no end to your iniquities.” (v. 5)
15 The text is scrambled, and some of the verses in Chapter 24 seem to belong to one or the other of the friends. (Note that Zophar’s speech is missing in the third cycle.)
What’s the matter with God? Why can’t he pay attention to what’s going on down here on earth? The wicked are running around stealing land, grabbing the orphan’s donkey and the widow’s ox. They run the needy off the road. The poor lie naked under the night sky. They are wet from the rain in the mountains where they have hidden from their wicked masters. (24:1-8)

Things are no better in the city. Under cover of darkness, the murderer and the adulterer go about their ugly business. (vv. 13ff)

*The dying groan,*
*And the throat of the wounded cries for help;*
*Yet God pays no attention to their prayer.* (24:12)

**Bildad speaks. (Chapter 25)**

God is the supreme ruler of the universe. We are so far beneath him, that it’s impossible for any of us to be righteous in his sight.

*How then can a mortal be righteous before God?*
*How can one born of woman be pure?*
*If even the moon is not bright*
*And the stars are not pure in his sight,*
*how much less a mortal, who is a maggot,*
*And a human being, who is a worm!* (vv. 4-6)

Job replies (Chapters 26 and 27:1-6)

Some friends you are! How you have “helped” powerless little me!

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16 *Therefore I am terrified at his presence;*  
*When I consider, I am in dread of him.*  
*God has made my heart faint;*  
*If only I could vanish in darkness,*  
*and thick darkness would cover my face!* (23:15-17)

17 Part of Bildad’s speech may have been misplaced.
Let’s get a couple of things straight. God is truly awesome. No one is like him in knowledge or power. I have never denied it. But the fact remains that he has treated me like shit. Therefore I will speak the truth. I will not agree that I deserve the way God has treated me.

As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, My lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put my integrity away from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days. (27:2-6)

The Hymn to Wisdom (Chapter 28)

Wisdom is as hard to find as precious metals. God alone knows where to find it. For us humans, to “fear of the Lord” and “depart from evil” is wisdom. (v. 28)

Job sums up his case, takes an “oath of innocence,” and demands an answer from God. (Chapters 29 – 31)

Chapter 29

It's time to sum up my case against God ...

I always knew that this world could be a dark and dangerous place. But it was ok, because God was my friend. His light was on my path, and he guided me through the treacherous places. He blessed me in every way. With wisdom and wealth and social position. With many children.

How I long for those days! When I went to the city square, everyone took note. The younger men backed off, the older ones stood out of respect. Even the noblemen stopped talking and listened to see what I, Job, had to say.
Everyone looked up to me, because I was known for my wisdom and for my generosity and fairness. I cared for the widow and the orphan, I defended the weak, I championed the cause of the innocent and rescued them from the fangs of the wicked.

Naturally, I thought, it would always be like this. I would live to a great age, and all of my days would be warmed by God's favor. I certainly had no intention of rocking the boat – of turning my back on God and bringing his wrath down upon me!

Chapter 30

But then, disaster struck, and everyone blamed the victim. Now they snicker at me in the village streets. They make up little ditties to mock me when I pass by. Even the outcasts of society make sport of me.

They see that God has cast me off, and they rejoice in my misfortune. God has pushed me down into the mud, and the scum of society pile on. They are only too happy to kick a good man when he's down.

I'm talking to you, God. I say that you are cruel. I cry out to you in my misery, and you are silent. You just watch. When you tire of the sport, no doubt you'll just throw me away.

That's not how I treated those who needed me. Didn't I do everything I could to help those in need? Didn't I try to make the world better place?

- Did I not weep for those whose day was hard?
- Was not my soul grieved for the poor? (v. 25)

But now that I need help, no one comes to my aid.

I'm sick at the stomach. Every day is another day of affliction.

- I am brother of jackals,
- and a companion of ostriches.
- My skin turns black and falls from me,
- and my bones burn with heat.
- My lyre is tuned to mourning,
- and my pipe to the voice of those who weep. (vv. 28-31)

Chapter 31
I refuse to give up on God. I am going swear an oath of innocence, and force him to publish his indictment against me and listen to my defense. I will invite everyone to compare the particulars of the indictment with the record of my life. It won't matter what's in the indictment – I won't be guilty of a single one of the charges. I've always known that God sees everything we do, and I've always known – or at least thought I knew – that God would punish me severely if I stepped out of line. I've never been such a fool as to risk God's displeasure.

So now I'm going to draw up a written list of all the wicked things I know I have not done. Then I'll sign it in the presence of everyone. If God cares anything for his reputation, he will have to answer me.

Here goes...

[Job takes up a pen and writes.]

I, Job, have never so much as looked at a virgin.
I've never gone after another man's wife.
I've never told a lie.
I have never concealed a sin, or shown a false face in public.
I've never been unfair to any of my slaves.
I've never withheld assistance from the poor – the widow and the orphan could always count on Job.
I have never set my heart on gold, and when I did become rich, I gave all the credit to God.
I have never worshiped the moon or the sun or anything else besides the one true God.
I have never rejoiced at the ruin of others – not even of my enemies. I have never cursed them or asked God to kill them.
I have never failed to show hospitality to a stranger.
I have never stolen land or refused to pay those who work the land.

**If I, Job, have done a single one of these things, then let the same or worse be done to me!**

[With a great flourish, Job signs the paper.]
There, then! I've signed it. Let the Almighty answer me! It's his turn now. Let him read out his indictment – let him tell the world just what it is that I am supposed to have done wrong.

When God gives me the paper on which he has written out his charges against me, I'll wear it on my shoulder like a badge of honor. Better yet, I'll wear it on my head like a crown! Then I will stand before him like a prince, and defend my ways to his face!

[ Skipping the Elihu speeches, chapters 32-37]

_Then the LORD answered Job out of a whirlwind…_

Chapter 38:1-38 (Creation, cosmos, and the weather)

[ Storm clouds have been gathering while Job was summing up his case against God. A tornado moves lazily toward Job, then pauses. As soon as Job falls silent, a mysterious Voice begins speaking. It seems to be coming from the center of the whirlwind itself. Job immediately recognizes it as the Voice of God. ]

Who is this that's been talking trash about me and my Grand Design? Stand up like a man while I ask you a few questions. Then we'll see what you have to say for yourself.

Were you there at creation? Were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth, when the morning stars sang together, and the angels shouted for joy? (vv, 4,7)

Don't you know who did all this? Don't you know who conquered chaos and tamed the mighty sea, keeping it safely within bounds?

Have you commanded the sun to rise, driving the wicked into hiding? Have you put out the light of their eyes or broken their arms?

Have you traveled to the sea's source? Have you walked right up to the gates of hell and gazed into the darkness of death?

Do you have any idea how big the universe is? Tell me if you know the least little thing about all this.

Do you know where light comes from, or what causes darkness? When it's time to sleep, can you take light by the hand and lead it safely home?
Surely you must know about these things! To hear you talk, you must have been in on God's plans. You must be older than creation!

Do you know where to find the snow and the hail I keep in reserve for the Day of Terror and Destruction?

Do you know the paths that are traveled by the wind? Can you make it blow where you wish?

And tell me this. Who decides to make the rain fall where no one lives, making the wild grasses spring up in the desert?

Where does the rain come from, anyway? Does it have a father? And what about the ice? Does it have a mother?

Do you guide the stars? Do you know the rules of heaven? And can you make them a reality on earth?

Can you call up a storm? Can you order up a column of lightning bolts? Will they say “Yessir” to you and rush off to do your bidding?

Did you make the human mind? Did you set the limits of human wisdom and understanding?

What human being can tell the number of the clouds, or spill their water, making mud on the dusty earth?

Chapter 38:39 – 39:30 (The animals)

Do you hunt prey for the lion and the raven? Do you satisfy the appetite of their young when they cry to God for lack of food?

Do you know how the mountain goat gives birth? Have you observed the calving of a deer?

Have you let the wild ass go free? Have you provided a home for it in the open spaces?

Is the wild ox willing to work for you? Will it help you grind your grain? And will it return to you if you release it?

And what about the foolish ostrich? It forgets its eggs, and mistreats its young, because God has made it stupid. It spreads its wings and laughs at nothing.

Did you make the brave and mighty horse? At the sound of battle, it snorts and paws the ground, impatient to join the fray.

Do you make the hawk soar above the earth? Is it at your command that the eagle builds its nest high up on a rock crag?
From there it spies its prey;
its eyes see it from far away.
Its young ones suck up blood;
and where the slain are, there it is. (39:29-30)

Chapter 40:1-5 (God challenges Job to answer.)

[ Job is crouched over, his hand over his mouth. He is doing his best to be invisible. ]

God to Job: Where's that big-mouth faultfinder got to? Oh, there you are... You wanted to argue with God, my fine friend. Now you must answer. What do you have to say for yourself? How are you going to answer my questions?

Job replies: Such questions! What answer could I possibly give? Clearly, I've already said too much. I see that I don't count for a damn thing in the grand scheme of things. Clearly, it's time for me to shut up.

Then the Lord (again) answered Job from the whirlwind.

Chapters 40:6 – 41:34 (God speaks briefly about justice and power, then about Behemoth and Leviathan)

Stand up straight, man! I have some more questions for you.

You've been trying to put yourself in the right by putting me in the wrong. Who do you think you are, anyway? Do you have and arm like mine? Can you thunder with a voice like mine? Can you do what I can do?

You've been doing a lot of complaining about the wicked. “Why doesn't God punish them?” you asked. “Why doesn't he kill them and send them screaming into the world below?”

Fine. If that's the kind of world you really want, you do it. Go ahead. Put on a judge's robe, and sit in my place. Drag the wicked into court and pour out your anger on them. Condemn them to whatever punishment you like.

When you've actually done something about the wicked, then I'll listen to what you have to say. I'll acknowledge that “your own right hand can give you the victory.”
Take a look at Behemoth... I made him the same way I made you. He is one tough beast – the first of the “great acts of God.” Only his maker can approach him with a sword.

There he is now, sitting in the marsh weeds. Can you tame him? Can you put a hook in his nose and lead him where you like?

If Behemoth is not already too much for you, consider Leviathan – that armor-plated, fire-breathing, sea serpent you see thrashing about in the sea. Neither a sword nor an arrow nor a club is of any use against this powerful beast. The gods themselves look at him and tremble. When he raises his head, they are beside themselves with fear.

So then, little man, what can you do to Leviathan? Will you catch him with a fishhook? Will you kill him in battle and sell his flesh at the market? Will you make a plaything of him, or put him on a leash for your girls?

Do you think Leviathan will make a covenant with the likes of you? Will he agree to serve you?

I hardly think so.

No one is so fierce as to dare to stir him up.
Who can stand before him?
Who can confront him and be safe
— under the whole of heaven who? (41:11)

Leviathan towers above every other creature. He surveys everything and everyone, from the highest to the lowest.

On earth, he has no equal,
[he is] a creature without fear. (41:33)

he is king over all that are proud. (41:34)

Chapter 42:1-6 (Job's final response)

I know, I know. All things – even Leviathan – are within your power. You can do whatever you please, and nobody can stop you.

You said that I'd been trash-talking your Grand Design. It's only too true. I was completely out of my depth, yammering on and on about things that are too “wonderful” for me to understand.
The trouble was – I’d only heard of you by report. I listened to the things people say about you. Then I looked around the world and drew my own conclusions about what you ought to be doing.

But now… Now my eye sees you, and it’s completely turned me around. Compared to what I now see, everything I used to care about is dust and ashes. Therefore I take back all those ignorant and thoughtless words. I am content.

*Or… Do you think that the last paragraph should read something like this?*

But now… My eye sees you, and it’s made me see just how wrong I was. I have sinned against Almighty God – first in my heart, and then with my lips. I am truly sorry, and I humbly repent in dust and ashes.

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**AFTERTHOUGHT**

*Do you find yourself wishing that Job had said something like this?*

What’s all this? I asked for an explanation, and I hoped for vindication. Finally, you break your silence, but all I get is a lot of cosmic bluster.

When did I ever deny that the cosmos is *big*? Or that you made it? My complaint had nothing to withe the size of creation, but with the way things are going down here on earth.

I have never doubted that you can do “all things.” On the contrary, I have repeatedly *asserted* it. I know that *you* can stand up to Leviathan and all the other forces of evil in the world. My question is, *why don’t you do it?* Why don’t you rescue the innocent and break the fangs of the wicked? Are you sleeping on the job or what?

The question isn’t about the extent of your power. It’s about the way you *exercise* it. I, Job, have done my best to stand up for the poor and the oppressed. On many occasions, I’ve rescued a mistreated slave from a wicked master. But there a lot of wicked masters out there, and unlike you, I am only a man. When did I ever say that *my* right arm could give me the “victory?” That is *God’s* job you’re asking me to do. Why aren’t you doing it?
What’s all this about the weather, anyway? So what if I don’t know where the hail is stored? Does that show that you are not responsible for using it to ruin crops? So what if I can’t make the wind blow where I like? How is that supposed to show that you are not responsible for making it blow down the house where my children were all dining?

You go on and on about animals, I haven’t the slightest idea why you’re bringing them in. How is the fact that you made lions and eagles and the stupid ostrich supposed to show that you have not made me suffer unfairly? And how in hell is the fact that I don’t know all about the birthing of mountain goats supposed to invalidate my case against you?

The truth is that nothing you’ve said here has the slightest tendency to show that you have treated me fairly or that you are a just ruler. Do you think that if you blow enough smoke I’ll stop demanding justice?

Sorry to disappoint you, God, but I will not stop. I refuse to be distracted. You may kill me for it, but I will speak the truth to your face. You are an unjust tyrant, and the way you are running things down here on earth stinks.

“What’s the Buzz?”
A review of “The Passion of the Christ”

I went to see Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” thinking and hoping that I would not like it. How can you possibly convey the emotion and significance of those final days of the life of Jesus in a two-hour movie? While I still maintain that “The Passion” does not give the viewer a full understanding of what it would have been like to be there, the movie did spark an emotional response from me and from the rest of the audience.

The most powerful feature of the movie is, of course, the violence. And, to start off, it is important to warn potential viewers that if movies with excessive violence bother you, then don’t see this movie. The flogging scene in particular caused me to cringe with every slash. Many believe that the message of the Gospels is lost in the violence, and that Gibson focuses solely on the events during the final days rather then trying to show the reason for and implications of Christ’s death. In fact, only a handful of references to the teachings of Christ are mentioned in flashbacks. Viewers who do not have a basic understanding of the story of Jesus surely do not leave the theater understanding the purpose of his death. But, this is precisely what I liked about the movie. Gibson realized that it is impossible to give justice to the whole story in one movie, and so he decided to
show the part at which he would do the best: showing the pure, raw violence of Christ’s Passion.

My favorite part of the movie was the decision to include the character of Satan. His taunting of Christ and delight in his suffering gives the viewer a better feel and fear of the evil present than any amount of violence can. In general the characters are the epitome of what they could have been. Pilate is racked with despair over his misfortune of trying Jesus. The Pharisees have no compassion for the general public, let alone for Jesus. And, the soldiers are bumbling idiots who take delight in torturing Jesus. This extreme characterization does not allow the viewer to identify with any particular character, which is a fault of the movie. But, at the same time, these characterizations do allow the viewer to see the atmosphere of Jerusalem as one would imagine it being during the arrest, torture, and crucifixion of such a controversial person. The cinematography, visual effects, and music are designed to amplify your emotional response as well. My least favorite part of the movie was the use of these elements to create specific emotions in the viewer rather then to show the story and let the viewer react for himself.

The story of the Passion is a powerful enough story, and the filmmaker need not add his own insight or interpretation in order for it to be intriguing. I do not think the point of this movie is to show the purpose of Christ’s death or “what it all means”. If you seek answers to those questions, then I invite you to look to the Gospel itself rather then any interpretation that a filmmaker or author can give. If, in making this movie, Gibson can give people an emotional attachment to the person and suffering of Christ, then he has succeeded in his goal of allowing people to identify with a 2000–year–old story. This movie is a great step forward from songs about a superstar and a bunch of fools crying “What’s the Buzz?” The story of the Passion is a gruesome and uncomfortable one, and after watching this movie I know that better then ever.

Dan Smith
University of Colorado Theology Forum

(Under) the Table Talk

"Peter Lombard was adequate as a theologian; none has been his equal . . . He was a great man. If he had by chance come across the Bible he would no doubt have been the greatest."

Martin Luther