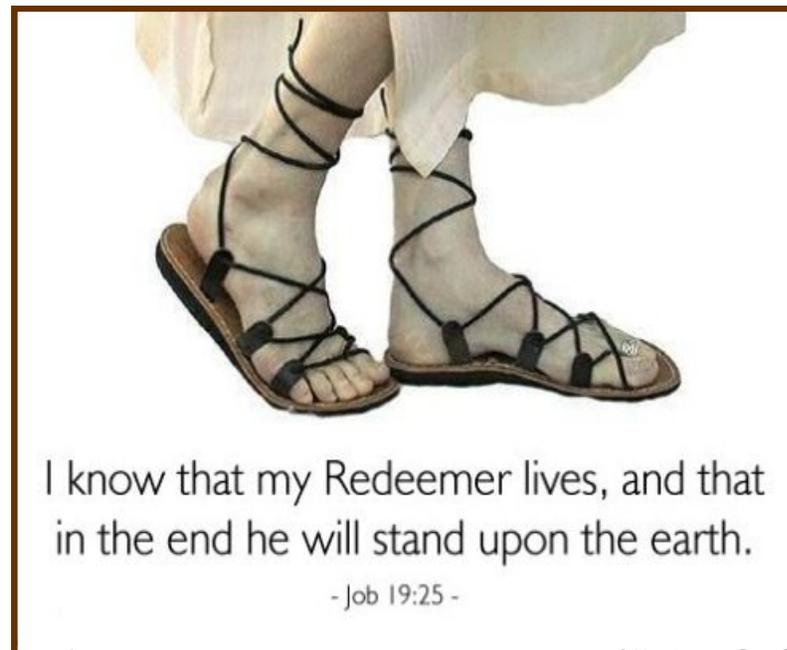


Job

Chapter Fifteen:



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

New Condemnation of Job

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The commentary on the Book of Job, is by Saint Thomas Aquinas and was translated by Brian Mulladay and edited by Rev. Joseph Kenny, O.P. The book shows how human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: NEW CONDEMNATION OF JOB

The First Lesson: Job's Pride and Presumption

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered saying: 2 Will the wise man answer as though he were speaking to the wind and will he fill his stomach with? 3 You blame with words one who is not equal to you and you say what is not profitable to you. 4 As much as you can, you have rejected fear and you have born away prayer from the presence of God. 5 For your wickedness has taught your tongue and you imitate the tongue of blasphemers. 6 Your mouth will condemn you and not I and your lips will answer for you. 7 Were you born the first man and formed before all the hills? 8 Have you been a party to the counsel of God, and will his wisdom be beneath you? 9 What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand which we do not? 10 Both old men and the elders are much older among us than your fathers. 11 Is it a great thing for God to console you? For your evil words prohibit this. 12 Why does your heart lift you up and as if you were thinking great things do you open your eyes wide in astonishment? 13 What causes your spirit to swell against God so that you speak words like this from your mouth.

After hearing Job's response, Eliphaz does not answer the depth of his reasoning but tries to calumniously misrepresent certain words Job has spoken and interpret them according to their superficial meaning, not the depth of their meaning. He first reproaches Job's statement in the beginning of his discourse when he said, "I too have a heart as do you and this heart is not less than yours." (12:3) In this Eliphaz cites him for two things. First, he says he is guilty of empty boasting because he commends himself and he speaks to this theme saying, "Will the wise man answer as though he were speaking to the wind?" This is because someone seems to speak to the wind when he composes a speech to obtain glory. Second, about anger because he had begun to speak by reproaching them saying, "So you think only you are men." (12:2) Therefore he says, "and will he fill his stomach with passion?" i.e. his spirit with anger."

Job acted against God in this way:

**"He ran against him with his head erect," proudly.
For man resists God whom he ought to serve
in humility mostly through pride.**

**Sirach agrees with this,
"The proud man begins by falling away from God."
(Sirach 10:14)**

**Just as one who loves God is said to run in his ways because
of his readiness in will to serve him, so the proud man is said
to run against God because of his presumption of spirit.**

This blighting usually results from frost by which he means exterior persecution.

“And as the olive lets its flowers fall,” usually from some intrinsic cause which means here the meriting of adversity on the part of the one who suffers. Respecting this merit he says, “what the hypocrite collects is sterile,” because what is gathered by the hypocrite bears no fruit, “and fire will devour the tents of those who freely accepts gifts.” For things acquired wickedly are sometimes easily destroyed according to divine judgment. He says this throwing the theft and hypocrisy of Job in relief as though adversity had befallen him because of his sins. He adds a third sin of deceit.

So the text continues, “He conceived pain,” because he premeditated in his heart the kind of pain he would inflict on others. The conception of this pain has born harm unjustly inflicted and so the text continues, “and given birth to evil.” He adds as a consequence the manner in which he accomplished this saying, “and his womb prepares evil intent.”

Truly a hypocrite’s nature is to plot harm against others by deceit, not in the open. By the term “womb” he means the heart in which spiritual conceptions take place after the manner of the corporeal conceptions which take place in the womb.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 15

He next reproves him for saying, “I want to dispute with God,” (13:3) and again, “Spare me in only two things and then I will not hide myself from your face and so on.” (13:20) In this reproach he cites him for many things. First, for pride because he contends against someone who is greater than he is. He speaks to this theme saying, “You blame with words one who is not equal to you.” Second, for foolishness because Eliphaz thought such a dispute was harmful, and so he says, “You say what is not profitable for you,” by arguing with God. He shows why it is not advantageous to debate with God because this sort of dispute excludes two most necessary things. The first of these is the fear of God. For he who fears someone does not presume to discuss contentiously with him. Job had also expressed the same thing already saying, “And let your power not terrify me.” (13:21) Therefore Eliphaz says here, “As much as you can, you have rejected fear,” because you tried to exclude the fear of God from yourself. The second is prayer to God. For arguing with someone and entreating him are two different sorts of things. So he then says, “You have born away,” taken away, “prayer from the presence of God.” This goes against what Eliphaz had said, “This is why I entreat the Lord.” (5:8) Job had not disputed with God from pride, but out of confidence in the truth. But Eliphaz rashly judged this to flow from wickedness and so he then says, “For your wickedness has taught your tongue,” as if to say: It is apparent from the effect that you blaspheme and so he then says, “and you imitate the tongue of blasphemers.” In reality, the man who blasphemes denies the justice of God. But one who disputes with God about his justice seems to imitate the language of the blasphemers. To argue about something seems characteristic of one who doubts it; and one who doubts it is close to denying.

So Eliphaz wishes to condemn Job for arguing and he first says that Job had spoken such manifest evil that no other reproof is necessary. His very words themselves show his evil intent. He expresses this saying, "Your mouth will condemn you and not I, and your lips will answer for you," as if to say: Your words need no other answer but they destroy themselves. Still he shows that the argument he used was unfitting in many ways.

First, by comparison of Job to all creatures. For if any creature could argue with God, this would be really fitting only for the first and most excellent of creatures, a condition which does not befit God and so Eliphaz says, "Were you born the first man and formed before all the hills," so that for this reason you would have the competence to argue with God on behalf of the whole human race and every creature?

Second, by comparison with God. For one can dispute with someone about his deeds fittingly when he knows the reason why the one with whom he is arguing acts. He can know this in two ways. In one way, by learning it from him. In another way, by judging the deeds of the other from a higher wisdom. Neither of these ways is fitting to Job in the comparison of man to God. So he says, "Have you been a party to the counsel of God?" to express the first theme of learning from him and "and will his wisdom be beneath you," to express the second theme.

Third, he shows it in comparison to other men. But Job does not in fact seem to be any wiser than others from confidence in the possession of a higher knowledge so that he can presume to dispute with God. So he then says, "What do you know," from faith or revelation, "that we do not know?"

If a tree is uprooted and replanted, it recovers its strength if it can put forth its root in the earth. But if it cannot put forth its root in the earth, it cannot grow strong again.

To explain this he says, "He will not emerge from the darkness," i.e. from the state of adversity. He gives the reason for not returning to the light when he says, "a flame will dry his branches." For there is still hope of reviving a tree if it has been uprooted as long as its branches remain green because they can be grafted and replanted. But if the branches are burned up, no further hope of reviving it remains. The branches of a man are his sons and other persons related to him in whom a man sometimes rises again from adversity. But the sons of Job had been killed and his household had perished. He himself had even been afflicted with illness, which he states continuing, "and will be born away by the breath of his mouth," by his proud words.

He cannot hope for any sort of renewal, not even from God whom pride of words offends and so he says, "Let him not trust in vain, deceived that he is deemed by some price," for he must be freed by some help from tribulation. He posits as a fourth bitter thing the shortness of his life.

So he then says, "He will perish before his days are complete," since he will die before his time may be completed, "and his hands will dry up," for his sons and his relations will fail. Then he gives an example. "His grapes will be blighted just like the vineyard in first flower."

The Third Lesson: The Unhappy Finish of the Wicked

28 He will live in desolate cities and in deserted houses which have been turned into mounds of earth. 29 He will not become wealthy nor preserve his substance, nor put forth roots in the earth. 30 He will not emerge from darkness, a flame will dry his branches, and will be born away by the breath of his mouth. 31 Let him not trust in vain, deceived by error, that he is redeemed by some price. 32 He will perish before his days are complete and his hands will dry up. 33 His grapes will be blighted just like the vineyard in first flower and as the olive lets its flowers fall, 34 what the hypocrite collects is sterile and fire will devour the tents of those who freely accept gifts. 35 He has conceived pain and given birth to evil and his womb prepares evil intent.

After Eliphaz shows the anxieties of fear which the wicked man suffers even when his is in the state of prosperity, he now speaks about the bitter things by which he is consumed when he has been cast down in adversity to answer Job's statement, "Do you write bitter things against me and punish me for the sins of my youth?" (13:26)

He places becoming a fugitive as the first of these bitter things. Fugitives normally seek out hidden and uninhabited places and so he says, "He will live in desolate cities and in deserted houses which have been turned into mounds of earth." These are the kind of places where fugitives usually take refuge. Second is that he is despoiled of his riches and so he says, "He will not become wealthy," by acquiring new riches, "nor will he preserve his substance," to retain the riches he has already acquired. The third bitter thing is the impossibility of recovering his wealth. So he says, "nor will he put forth his roots in the earth."

"What do you understand," by natural knowledge," that we do not know?" But since Job could boast of knowledge received from others, he then says, "Both old men," in dignity of knowledge and life, "and the elders," in time, "are much older among us than your fathers," than your teachers from whom you received knowledge, or according to the literal sense, your ancestors. He wants to convey a greater knowledge from a greater age, because a man is made wiser by long experience in years. Fourth, on the part of Job himself, he shows his dispute with God has not been fitting. First, because it was harmful to him expanding what he had already said, "You say what is not profitable for you." (v.3) So, he says, "Is it a great thing for God to console you?" He means here: It is easy for God to lead you back to a state of prosperity, "for he both wounds, and he binds up," as was already said. (5:18) "But your evil words prohibit this," by which you provoke the anger of God more against you. Second, he shows that the debate was vain and proud, expanding something he had said already, "Will the wise man answer as though he were speaking to the wind?" (v.2) So he then says, "Why does your heart lift you up," in pride to make you presume so much on your wisdom.

He tries to demonstrate a sign of pride saying, "and as if you were thinking great things, why do you open your eyes wide in astonishment?" For when someone thinks about great, wonderful things, he is entranced and he opens his eyes wide in astonishment. Third, he shows that this dispute was presumptuous and impious, also explaining a previous statement, "You blame with words someone who is not equal to you." (v.3) Here then he says, "What causes your spirit to swell against God so that you speak words like this from your mouth," with which you start an argument with God?

The Second Lesson: Divine Punishment is Inevitable

14 What is man that he should be without stain and be born just from his mother's womb?

15 Look! Among his holy ones, not one is unchangeable and the heavens are not pure in his presence.

16 How much more abominable and useless is man who drinks evil like water?

17 I will show you, listen to me; what I have seen, I will tell you.

18 Wise men confess and do not hide their fathers.

19 The earth is given to men alone and the stranger will not tread their ground.

20 For all his days, the evil man is proud, and the number of years of his tyranny is uncertain.

21 The sound of terror is always in the ear of that man, and when there is peace, he suspects plots.

22 He does not believe he can return from darkness to light when he sees the sword everywhere around him.

23 When he goes to look for bread, he knows that a day of darkness is at hand.

24 Tribulation will terrify him and anguish will wall him in, like a king who is prepared for battle.

25 For truly he extended his hand against God and he fortified himself against the Almighty.

26 He ran against him with head erect, and he is furnished with a fat neck.

27 Thick darkness covered his face and lard hangs from his sides.

He next shows why the tyrannical, evil man goes astray in such great unhappiness caused by fear saying, "For truly he extended his hand against God," by acting against God, "and he fortified himself against the Almighty," i.e. because he used the power given him against God. He shows how Job has acted against God saying, "He ran against him with his head erect," proudly. For man resists God whom he ought to serve in humility most through pride.

Sirach agrees with this, "The proud man begins by falling away from God." (10:14) Just as one who loves God is said to run in his ways because of his readiness in will to serve him, so the proud man is said to run against God because of his presumption of spirit.

Pride usually arises from an abundance of temporal goods, and so the text continues, "he is furnished with a fat neck," by acting proud against God. For fat is caused by an abundance of humors and so is an image for an abundance of temporal goods. Just as humility is the first stage of wisdom, so pride is an obstacle to wisdom and so the text continues, "Thick darkness covered his face," because the covering of his face is an image for the impediment to knowledge.

Not only does Job have the opulence which causes pride, but this extends even to his companions and so the text continues, "lard hangs from his sides." By all these expressions he intends to show that opulence made Job fall into the pride which makes him stand against God and act tyrannically against other men. Therefore he came to the suspicion that he suspects God as his adversary and a conspirator.

Now when one has fears about some of his enemies, he can hope to escape even if he is defeated for a while with the help of his friends. But one who confides in no one and fears everyone cannot hope for deliverance after he is oppressed, and so he next says, “He does not believe that he can return from darkness to light,” from a state of adversity to a state of prosperity, “when he sees the sword everywhere around him,” when he sees enemies threatening him on all sides.

He says this especially to answer what Job had said already, “I, who am consumed by rot and like a garment eaten by a moth.” (13:28) Eliphaz understood by this the Job was in despair of being delivered. Now although a tyrant fears all strangers, he still can sometimes confide in the members of his family or his household with whom he lives securely. But when his evil is beyond all measure, he fears even the members of his own household with whom he lives and so the text continues, “When he goes to look for bread, he knows that the day of darkness is at hand,” i.e. the day of death.

This is as if to say: Not only is he suspicious of plots in his dealings with outsiders when he must associate with strangers, but he also is suspicious in his dealings with the members of his household in eating, drinking and the like. He believes that death is being prepared for him by the members of his own household. Since he has such fears of everyone, he does not rest but is always plotting something against those whom he fears.

Therefore, the occasion of fear is ever multiplied for him, and so he says, “Tribulation will terrify him,” threatening him by the actions of others, “and anguish will hit him,” because he fears danger from every quarter. “Like a king who is prepared for battle,” because a king who is prepared for battle is so in anguish from fear that he will lose, that he still tries to destroy his enemies.

After Eliphaz had censured Job for his provoking God to argue which he thought pertained to presumption of wisdom, he now censures him for presumption of justice because he had said, “If I am judged, I know I would be found just.” (13:18) Eliphaz attacks this statement first because of the frailty of the human condition in which man avoids sin with difficulty and so he says, “What is man that he should be without stain.” Man even does good with difficulty and so he continues, “and be born just from his mother’s womb?” For, as Proverbs says, “Justice in abundance is the greatest virtue.” (15:5) This does not seem to suit one who has his origin from the basest thing.

Second, he attacks the same statement by comparing him to more noble creatures, and so he then says, “Look! Among his holy ones,” the angels, “not one is unchangeable,” from his own nature, but they can only be turned away from sin because of the gift of divine grace. “And the heavens,” which hold the supreme place of purity among bodies, “are not pure in his presence,” in comparison to him since they are material, corporeal and changeable.

Third, he attacks the same statement from the personal condition of Job himself, as a conclusion to the major (premise above in v. 15) “How much more abominable,” through sin, “and useless,” by the failure of justice, “is the man who drinks evil like water,” i.e. who commits evil as if it were nothing and without any consideration. For someone who drinks wine has to drink with careful attention so that he does not become drunk. This is not the case with someone who drinks water. In this he notes that Job would easily fall into evil like a man drinks water easily and readily.

After Eliphaz had censured Job for provoking God to argument and presuming his own justice, he now censures him about the words he used in the argument and especially for his statement, "Do you think of me as your enemy? Do you show your power against the leaf which is driven by the wind?" (13:24 and 25) and "You have placed my feet in fetters and so on." (13:27) First he gets his attention saying, "I will show you," what you were asking from God, "listen to me," carefully.

He shows how he can show him saying next, "what I have seen," in the discovery of his own intellect, "I will tell you." Besides, I will not be embarrassed to tell you what I have heard from others, putting them forward as my authority, because "Wise men confess and do not hide their fathers," from whom they learned wisdom. It is truly the lot of the ignorant and the proud to attribute what they have learned from others to themselves.

He then shows why they should not be hidden because of their dignity saying, "The earth has been given to men alone." This statement can be related indifferently and in the same sense either to the wise men or to their fathers, whom he also wishes to be understood as wise. The earth is said to have been given only to wise men because they are lords of earthly goods in that they use them only for their own good. However, foolish men use them to their own harm, as Wisdom says, "Creatures were made as a snare to the feet of the foolish." (14:11) To show the dignity of these men he says, "and the stranger will not tread their ground," because those who are strangers to wisdom cannot be numbered among the fellowship of the wise. Or because the wise are not supplied by strangers. For the stranger is said to tread on those who are conquered and are made subject to the power of a foreigner.

Pg 7

After he has gotten the attention of his listener, he then tries to answer the arguments which Job had used in debate. He understood Job to have said two things in these arguments. First, Job was living in anguish and fear, as though God pursued him and laid traps for him because he said, "Why do you think of me as your enemy?" (13:24) and "Have you observed all my paths?" (13:27)

Second, because he believed that Job doubted his own ruin when he said, "Do you write bitter things against me and want to consume me for the sins of my youth?" (13:26) First, then, he speaks against the first argument and then against the second in these words, "He will live in desolate cities." (v.28) Therefore, he first shows the root for which the suspicion mentioned already arises in Job's heart: his impiety and his will to do harm. So he says, "For all his days, the evil man is proud," because he exalts himself against God to harm men. He uses the term "days" to mean not the days of his life, but the days when he has power and prosperity. But since the will to harm someone else comes from the man himself, but the power to harm comes from God, he cannot know how long he is given the power to carry out his evil will. So he continues, "The number of years of his tyranny is uncertain."

From this lack of certainty, suspicion and fear arise. He describes this suspicion and fear as a consequence saying, "The sound of terror is always in the ear of that man," since he is threatened by every rumor thinking some attack is being prepared against him. It is as though he confides in no one.

To express this theme, he adds, "when there is peace, that man suspects plots," for although no one is plotting against him, he still is terrified of everyone because of his own evil will by which he will be prepared to harm anyone.

Pg 8