

Job shows why he is compared to the tree which is barren from two things. First because he has consumed his goods in useless things, and so he says, "For he feeds the barren women who does not produce offspring and he has done no good to the widow." The one who consumes his goods in useless things is a metaphor for someone who uselessly supports a barren wife. Second, he is compared in this way because he does not aid those in need, which could have been fruitful for him, and so he says, "and he has done no good to the widow." By "the widow" he means all the needy. Not only has he been unfruitful, but he has also been harmful like a tree bearing poisonous fruit, and so he says, "he has thrown down the powerful man in his strength," that is, he did not use his power to aid the oppressed, but more to oppress the powerful. The harm he has worked on others also returns to his own harm, because he cannot live in security since he fears being harmed by those he has harmed, and so he says, "and when he rises up," i.e. when he has suffers no adversity, "he will not believe in his own life," for he will not be free from care about his own life according to what Eliphaz said above, "The sound of terror is always in his ears, and when he is at peace, he always expects treachery. (15:21.)

He then gives the reason why the sinner must be punished without mercy, because he did not want to profit from the mercy of God when he could have, and so he says, "God gave him an occasion for penance," in deferring punishment, and this is the reason why he was permitted to live in prosperity for a long time. But what God has offered to him as a good he perverted to an evil, and so he says, "and he abuses it in his pride," by not attributing to the divine mercy the fact that he is not immediately punished after sinning. But he profited from this remission, daring to sin even to contempt of God. Although the sinner seeks darkness in order to sin, he still cannot prevent being seen, and so he says, "For his eyes," of God, "are on his ways," for they consider his course even if he walks under the cover of darkness. Therefore, "they have been raised up a little," to some earthly and perishable height, which God gives to them as an occasion of repentance. "And they will not stand firm," to the very end, because they abuse the mercy of God to the point of pride. He uses an analogy for this. Everything which is generated in time grows up in a determined time and afterwards begins to decay until it is totally destroyed. So it happens with the wicked, and so he says, "They will be humbled like everything else," which increases in time, "and will be borne away," completely, when they have reached their peak. He establishes the analogy saying, "and like the tops of the ears of wheat they will be ground down." For fruits of the earth are not ground down while they are in stalk and grow, but when they finally arrive at full maturity. In the same way the wicked are not punished by God immediately, but when they reach at their full stature, according to the measure foreseen by God. Job introduced this to show that if evil men are not punished in time, but lead a prosperous life, this does not happen from a defect of divine providence, but from the fact that God defers punishment until the right time. So he shows clearly that what Eliphaz had calumniously accused him of about the denial of divine providence is false. So he says, "If this is not so," as I have said earlier about the punishment of evildoers, just as you were of the opinion that man is always punished in this life for sins, "who can call me a liar," as though I am denying divine providence, "and accuse me for putting my words before God," that my words accused God as if they had been said against his providence.

**END OF JOB CHAPTER 24**

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# Job

## Chapter Twenty Four:



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

- Job 19:25 -

**Job Continues**

*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 TWENTY FOUR: JOB CONTINUES**

### **The Lesson: The Reconciliation of Evil with the Power and the Wisdom of God**

1 The times have not been hidden from the Almighty, but those who know him are ignorant about his days. 2 Some have changed boundaries, they rob flocks and have pastured them. 3 They have stolen the ass of the orphans and they have taken the widow's ox as a deposit. 4 They utterly ruined the road of the poor and they oppressed the gentle of the earth at the same time. 5 Others like the wild asses in the desert go forth to their work; they keep their eyes open for plunder and they prepare bread for their children. 6 They reap a field which is not their own and they glean the vine of one whom they have overcome by force. 7 They send men away naked taking away their garments and they have no covering in the cold. 8 They are soaked by the rain of the mountains and without any cover, they cling to rocks. 9 They have shown their power in robbing orphans and despoiled the poor crowd. 10 From the naked, from those going about without clothes, and from the hungry, they have stolen ears of corn. 11 Among these accumulations, they have taken a siesta and are thirsty even though they have tread the winepresses. 12 In the cities they made men groan, the souls of the wounded will cry out and God does not allow them to escape unpunished. 13 These were those who rebelled against the light, they did not know its ways nor did they return along its paths. 14 At the first light of morning, the murderer rises and kills the poor and the needy; and in the night he will be like a thief. 15 The eye of the adulterer watches for darkness saying: No one will see me. He will cover his face. 16 They steal through houses in the dark, as they have agreed during the day, and they were ignorant of the light. 17 If suddenly the dawn should appear, they think of it as the shadow of death; and they walk in the darkness as though they were in the light. 18 He is light on the surface of the waters; cursed be his lot on earth, nor let him walk on the road of the vineyards. 19 Let him cross over to great heat from freezing waters, and in sin to hell. 20 Let mercy forget him and let his sweetness become a worm. Let him not be in remembrance; but let him be cut down like a tree which bears no fruit. 21 For he feeds the barren woman who does not produce offspring; and he has done no good to the widow. 22 He has thrown down the powerful man in his strength; and when he rises up, he will not believe in his own life. 23 God gave him an opportunity to repent and he abuses it to the point of pride. For his eyes are on his ways. 24 They have been raised up a little and they will not stand firm. They will be humbled like everything else and will be born away. And like the tops of ears of wheat, they will be ground down. 25 If this is not so, who can call me a liar and accuse me of putting my words before God?

After describing the different kinds of sin in detail, he speaks then about their punishment. First he speaks about the punishment in the present life when he says, "Cursed be his lot on the earth." Each one's lot seems to be to him what he desires as the highest good. The sinner sets up his ultimate end in earthly things as his lot, according to Wisdom, "This is our portion and this is our lot." (2:9) This lot has been cursed because the goods of this world which he uses badly turn to evil for him. He shows this clearly when he says, "nor let him walk on the road of the vineyards." Roads in vineyards are usually shady and consequently cool. Vines even require a moderately cool place, for they are destroyed by the ice in places which are too cold, and in places which are exceedingly hot they are scorched by the heat. The evil man does not walk on the road of the vineyards because he does not use the things of this world moderately, but sometimes he goes aside to one extreme, sometimes to another, and to express this he then says, "let him pass over to great heat from freezing waters," as though changing from one vice to a contrary vice because he does not remain in the mean of virtue. All wicked men suffer this punishment because, "the inordinate soul is a punishment unto itself," as Augustine says in the *Confessions*.

He places next the punishment which will come after death when he then says, "and his sin to hell," by which he means: His portion is not only cursed on earth when he uses the things of the world inordinately, but he will also suffer the punishments for this in hell. One can also refer these punishments to the text, "he passes to great heat from freezing waters," because in hell there is no moderate temperature. Lest anyone believe that those punishments will end through the mercy of God, he adds, "the mercy," of God, "let it forget him," the sinner condemned to hell will never be freed from there. He shows what sort of punishment this is saying, "let his sweetness become a worm," for the pleasure of the sinner will be changed for him into a worm, which is the remorse of conscience about which the last chapter of Isaiah speaks: "Their worm will not die." (66:24) So he continues addressing the endless character of this punishment, "let him not be in remembrance," that is, let him be so totally abandoned by God without hope of being freed, as though he had forgotten him. He makes a comparison when he says, "but let him be cut down like a tree which bears no fruit." "For a tree which does not bear good fruit will be cut down and burned," (3:10) as we read in Matthew, whereas a fruitful tree is clipped so that it may be pruned as John says, "He will prune every tree which bears fruit, so that it may bear more." (15:2) Evil men are therefore punished for their extermination, just men for their perfection.

As a sign that they resist the spiritual light of wisdom he says that loving darkness they even hate exterior light, according to John, "Everyone who does evil hates the light." (3:20) So he continues here, "At the first light of morning, the murderer rises and kills the poor and needy," since at that hour there is usually no one about on the street, but some poor men, driven by necessity, anticipate the time for work, and thieves lie in ambush for them along the way. To show that to burglarize houses they need more darkness for this, he says, "and in the night he will be like a thief," robbing houses, for it would not be safe for him to do this in the early hours of the morning, because then men begin to wake up. He shows the same thing to be true for the adulterer saying, "The eye of the adulterer," who spies on the bed of another, "watches for the darkness," so that he cannot be caught, and so he says, "saying: No one will see me," that is, he watches in the dark so that he will not be seen by anyone. As if the cover of night were not enough for him, he employs still other method of concealment, and so he says, "and he will cover his face," by changing his clothes in some way. Just as he watches for darkness to begin his deed, so also he does the deed in darkness, and so he then says, "They steal through houses in the dark," removing any obstacles by any kind of fraud and violence, "as they have agreed the day before," the adulterer and the adulteress, "and they are ignorant of the light," because they abandon themselves to the complete execution of the evil deed.

"If suddenly," as though unprepared, because the time seems short to them when they are occupied in carnal pleasure, "the dawn should appear," which is the beginning of daylight, "they think of it as the shadow of death," that is, they think it is as hateful as the shadow of death when they see that they cannot continue their wanton activities anymore. For men are usually impeded in their acts in two ways. In one way when they do not foresee the outcome of a situation. In another way when they have a weak link in their resolve. But the adulterers, on the contrary, goaded by concupiscence, first throw themselves into dangers without consideration even though they do not know what will follow, and to make this clear he says, "And so in the darkness," in doubtful and dark circumstances, "as though in the light," in clear circumstances, "they walk," and proceed. Second, they put great faith in a small and frail thing, and so he says, "he," the adulterer, "is light on the surface of the waters," as if to say: He moves so lightly that it seems to him that he can pursue his own will as though he were sailing on calm seas. Or one can also explain the literal sense, "they walk in darkness as in light," in that both the adulterer and the adulteress love to do their works in the dark. The phrase which he adds, "he is light on the surface of the water," refers especially to the adulterer who believes that because of the drive of concupiscence he passes lightly even on water, i.e. over any difficulty or adversity whatsoever, to arrive at the enjoyment of the thing sought.

In the preceding chapter Job proved that he had not been punished because of malice as Eliphaz had asserted. (22:5) Now he wants to clearly show that he does not propose that God does not have care of human affairs, as Eliphaz had charged. (22:12) Consider here that some people proposed that God does not have knowledge and care of human things because of his distance from us. For they believed that just as we are not strong enough to know him because of such a distance, so he does not have the power to know us. But he rejects this first saying, "The times have not been hidden from the Almighty," as if to say: Although the Almighty is outside the mutability of the times, he still knows the course of the times. Those, however, who are in time know him in such a way that they are still not strong enough to comprehend the manner of his eternity, and so he says, "but those who know him," that is, men in time having some kind of knowledge of him either by natural knowledge or by faith or by the light of some higher wisdom, "are ignorant about his days," they are not strong enough to comprehend him in the manner of his eternity.

Since he had said that the course of temporal things was not unknown to God, he consequently shows in what way he judges temporal things, making first a list of the various faults of men, some of whom fraudulently inflict harmful things on others. So he says, "Some," among men, "have changed boundaries," by stealthily changing property limits. They have done the similar things with animals which are pastured in flocks. So he says, "they rob," stealthily, "flocks," of others, "and pastured them," so that they might seem to belong to them. He enlarges their fault from the condition of the persons on whom they inflict those injuries. People are usually compassionate to orphans because of their weakness of age and lack of parents. Against this he says, "They have stolen the ass of the orphans," because they make it wander off so that they might steal it with no compassion for the orphans. Similarly, people often have pity on widows because of the frailty of their sex and because they are deprived of the comfort of husbands, but against this he says, "and they take the widow's ox as a deposit," burdening her as though under some pretense of justice. Men also usually pity the poor who lack the means of economic survival, and against this he says, "They utterly ruined the road of the poor," for they took from them the ability to procure necessities for themselves by harassing them in many ways. Also men usually desist from harming those who do no harm to anyone, but live agreeably with others, and against this he says, "and they oppressed the gentle of the earth at the same time," who did not know either how to provoke another or be provoked.

However, there are some who do not harm others fraudulently like those already described, but through open violence. These men rush to do evil like people who are not restrained by the discipline of the law. He says about these men, "Others like the wild asses in the desert," the wild asses of the forests who are not domesticated to the service of men, "go forth to their work," to robbery like one who is enthusiastic for his profession. So he says, "and they keep their eyes open for plunder," to snatch it, "and they prepare bread for their children," that is, for their own children from what they have stolen. Then he determines the type of plunder saying, "They reap a field which is not their own," for they reap the harvest of another by violence. "And they glean the vine of someone whom they overcame by force," since they oppress someone beforehand in order to steal his goods more freely. They take away not only exterior goods by violence, but also those goods which have already been taken for warming the body, and so he then says, "They send men away naked taking away their garments," because they leave them nothing. He adds the afflictions which they suffer from nakedness to increase the fault of theft more, and so he says, "and they have no covering in the cold." This might be tolerable somehow if they could relieve their nakedness in some other way. Clothes are not only necessary to keep warm against the cold, but also as a protection against the rain. Thus those left naked by thieves must not only be afflicted by the cold, but also get soaked by the rain. He expresses this saying, "they are soaked by the rain of the mountains." Men often flee to mountainous places which are more fortified from the fear of other thieves or enemies. There the rains are more frequent and severe because of the cold character of the climate, and naked men especially suffer. Moreover, there is some protection for nakedness if the one who does not have the covering of clothes at least has the cover of a house, but against this he says, "and without any cover," either of clothing or of a house, "they cling to the rocks," because they hide in caves of stone which one finds in mountainous regions.

He further increases their fault from the condition of miserable people whom they burden, and so he adds, "They show their power in robbing orphans," whom one should rather have supported, "and despoiled the poor crowd," whom they should rather have assisted. This would be tolerable somehow if they wanted to take away things from people who at least had enough. Thus he continues increasing their evils saying, "From the naked," those not having any clothes, "from those going about without any clothes," who from extreme need must even go out in public naked without clothes which pertains to a great lack of clothing. To show that they suffered want in food also he says, "and from the hungry." They cannot take away anything of great value from these men, but they are not ashamed to steal what little they have, and so he then says, "they have stolen the ears of wheat," as if to say: They have not taken from them a harvest which they do not have but some small ears of grain which they had collected for themselves. If, perhaps, they seem to have a surplus in anything, they take that away not thinking what deep poverty they suffer in other things, and so he says, "Among these accumulations," of fruits, "they have taken a siesta," for they have rested at noon as though bloated on the goods of others, "and are thirsty even though they have tread the wine presses," who immediately after the gathering of the grapes have little wine. Not only do they despoil men in exterior things, but they also injure them in their persons, and so he says, "In the cities they made men groan," since when some men have been injured, many of the citizens are disturbed. The very ones who have been injured wail, and so he says, "and the souls of the wounded will cry out, and God," from whom nothing is hidden of what is done in time," does not allow them to escape unpunished." This would not be the case if he did not have care over human affairs.

He now shows the reason why God does not suffer this to go unpunished from the fact that they did not sin from ignorance, but from malice. As a result of this malice they hate wisdom, because it censures their sins, and so he says, "These were those who rebelled against the light," in doing intentionally what is against what the light of reason teaches them. However, as "wisdom takes possession of those who desire her," (Wis. 6:14) so she flees from those who resist her, and so he says, "they did not know her ways," i.e. because they have a sense depraved by malice, they cannot recognize the actions of wisdom. Or, "They did not know," in that they have not approved and have not wanted to try the commandments of wisdom. He shows their lack of penitence when he then says, "nor did they return along its paths." For certainly those who return along the paths of wisdom, who although they rebelled against wisdom by sin, still come back to wisdom by repentance.