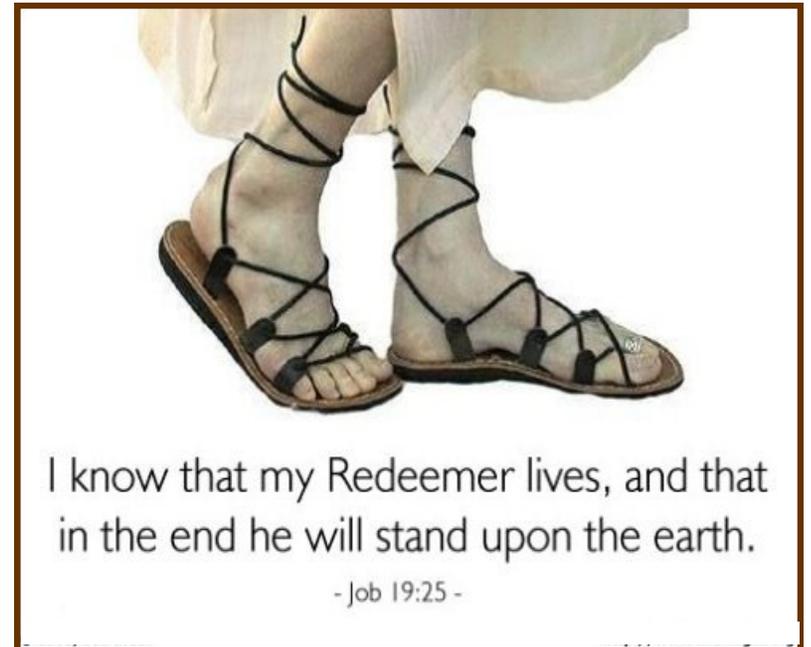


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# *Job*

## *Chapter Twenty:*



### *Sophar's Answer:*

*There is a future Life,  
but also Sanctions on Earth.*

*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: SOPHAR'S ANSWER: THERE IS A FUTURE LIFE,  
BUT ALSO SANCTIONS ON EARTH**

**The First Lesson: The Success of the Sinner is Short-lived**

1 Then Sophar the Naamathite answered and said: 2 Therefore my various thoughts succeed each other and my mind is disturbed about various things. 3 I will hear the teaching by which you criticize me and the spirit of my understanding will answer for me. 4 I know this from the beginning when man was placed on earth, 5 that the praise of the wicked is short-lived and the joy of the hypocrite is a speck. 6 If his pride ascends up to heaven and his head touches the clouds, 7 he will be thrown out in the end like dung and those who saw him will say: Where is he? 8 Like a dream flying away, he will not be found; he will pass away like a vision in the night. 9 The eye which saw him will not see him, nor will his place behold him anymore. 10 His children will be wasted by poverty and his hands will cause him pain. 11 His bones will be full of the vices of his youth and they will sleep with him in the dust. 12 Since wickedness was sweet in his mouth, he hid it under his tongue. 13 He will spare it and does not leave it and he will keep it secret in his throat.

After Sophar heard the opinion of Job about the hope of the future life, he seems to have acquiesced, and so after this second answer he contradicted nothing in the third one. But there was still something in his heart which did not permit him to give ground completely from his former opinion. For he thought that although retributions and punishments are made in the future life for merits, as he had learned from Job, nevertheless, it still seemed to him that the prosperity and adversity of this life were given to men by God as sanctions for virtues and sins. So as though convinced in part and yet holding his first opinion in part he says, "Therefore," namely, because of the words which you say about the future life, "my various thought succeed each other." He then says that these various thoughts should not be understood to belong to the same opinion, like when someone thinks out carefully various arguments for the same conclusion, "and my mind is disturbed about these various things," for I am led now to one opinion and now to the other by the force of the arguments which can be induced for both, as though the force of the arguments were incapable of resolving the contrary arguments. For he thought that he should not reject the opinion of Job about the hope of the future life, and so he says, "I will hear the teachings by which you argue with me," in believing what you have said about the future resurrection, but I still do not dismiss my first opinion totally. He expresses this saying, "and the spirit of my understanding will answer for me," as if to say: My intellect still knows what it should answer for its own opinion.

***"I WILL HEAR THE TEACHINGS  
BY WHICH YOU ARGUE WITH ME."***

He then explains in detail the punishments of this vengeance. First, he explains that the sinner will be surrendered to the power of the demons. As to this he says, "Terrors will go and come upon him," for the demons will receive free reign over him. Next he places the pain of loss when he says, "Utter darkness has invaded his hidden places," because he will suffer perfect interior and exterior darkness, far from the brightness of God. He says this darkness is in secret for as the brightness of the saints is hidden from us in this life, so is the darkness of the evil. He places next the pain of sense when he says, "Fire will devour him," not by consuming him, but by swallowing him in his affliction. This is "a fire," of Hell, "which is not enkindled," by man, but by divine power, according to Isaiah, "The breath of the Lord enkindled it like a torrent of sulphur." (30:33) In these punishments no aid will come to him, and so he says, "abandoned, he will be afflicted in his tent," from the fact that he is left without help and in the place of punishments destined for him.

After he describes the punishments which the sinner will suffer in himself, he then adds the punishments which pertain to him according to what remains of him after death in this life. First, as to how the sinner remains in the memories of men he says, "The heavens will reveal his evil," for by the power of heaven his evil, which was hidden while he lived, will be revealed after death, "and the earth will rise up against him," because when his evil is clearly seen, the men of the earth who perhaps revered him while he was alive will rise up against even the dead man. He places next his punishment as to what remains in his sons when he says, "The seed of his house will be open," because his sons will be exposed to trials, and this seed, "will be carried off," from this life "on the day of divine vengeance," that is, on this can also refer to the final judgment, when the saints will reveal the evil of the sinners, and the whole earth, "will wage war against the foolish." (5:21) The seed, that is, the works of sin, will be clearly seen. At last the evil man will be carried off to hell.

Then in epilogue he says, "This is the lot of the evil man given by God," which he acquired for himself by evil works, "and the heritage of his words from God," which he acquired for himself by his evil words. Note that in the foregoing he mixes the present and future punishments together.

**END OF JOB CHAPTER 20**

It seemed most certain to him and proved by experience that although the evil enjoy some prosperity, still it is brief and is also quickly destroyed in this life either by a premature death or by some subsequent adversity. He expresses this saying, "I know this," looking, "from the beginning when man was placed upon the earth," as though to say, from the beginning of the human race, "the praise of the wicked is shortlived." For they are sometimes praised for a little while because of some signs and beginnings of goodness which appear in them. But those are immediately darkened by the evil works which appear in them, and so the joy which they have from the favor which they take from pretense passes away in a short time. So he says, "and the joy of the hypocrites is like a speck," passing away in a moment, because afterwards they are known by their fruits, as Matthew 7:16 says. It sometimes happens that from that favor which he enjoyed for a short time from his pretense he was lifted up to some high rank, and so as a consequence he shows that this also will not endure for him, saying, "If his pride should ascend up to heaven," that is, if because of this high state which he has attained he ascends to such great pride that he does not think himself liable to fall as the earth, but immovable as the heaven, "and his head touches the clouds," so that it is like he is advanced beyond the common state of man, "he will be lost in the end like dung." This will happen either from a premature death by which he is rendered a human corpse and worthless, abominable like dung as Jeremiah says, "The dead body of a man falls like dung upon the face of the earth," (9:22) or by the fact that his evil will be disclosed to all and he will be reputed vile by all, as Scripture says, "Every woman who fornicates will be tread under foot like dung on the road." (Sirach 9:10) When his pride is cast down, wonder will arise in the hearts of men about such sudden loss, and the reverence which he enjoyed will end. So he says, "and those who saw him will say: Where is he?" either in wonder or contempt.

To show his dejection is irreparable he then says "Like a dream flying away he will not be found," for as a bird flying away easily disappears from the eyes of men, so also dreams easily disappear from human knowledge. As little or no trace remains of them, nor does there exist any testimony by which it could be brought back if it is lost, his knowledge passes away irreparably.

Sophar likewise gives one to understand that the downfall of the wicked is irreparable. He shows the causes of this irreparability are many. First, on the part of the sinner himself who perishes, and so the text says, "he will pass away like a vision in the night," which is a vision of sense image which is not lasting, and so after he loses it, it cannot return. A vision during the day is of something permanent, which if someone has ceased to see it, he can run back to see it again. In the same way, as long as he remains a sinner, if adversity should come to him, he can hope for recovery. But when he passes out of this life, there is not further hope for recovery. Second, he shows his fall to be irreparable on the part of other men when he then says, "The eye which saw him will not see:" for things which pass out of sight also pass easily out of mind, and so the dead who are withdrawn from human sight are easily forgotten. As a result, they neither have honor in the memories of men nor do their friends care to give them further aid. Third, he shows the cause of his inability to be restored, because he cannot return to his former state, and so he says, "nor will his place behold him any more." For man cannot return after death to the same mode of living. Not only will he himself be cast aside, passing away in his own person and be taken away from the eyes of men never to be restored to his own place, but his sons will also be punished for his sin. So the text continues, "His children will be wasted by extreme poverty," by the just judgment of God, so that since he sinned to attain the riches for his sons, he is even frustrated in his hope when his sons are impoverished.

Sophar considered then that the abundance of the evil man is harmful to him. As if from zeal for justice, he desires the greatest abundance of temporal goods for Job so that he suffers punishment. So the text continues, "Would that his belly be filled," with the abundance of temporal goods, "that he, "God", might send on him the anger of his fury," revenge without mercy. He shows the measure of his anger saying then, "and would shower his war upon him." He says "he would shower," to show an abundance of evils. By the fact that he says, "on him," that is, upon the strength of the sinner, he shows the impotence of the sinner to resist. When he says, "his war," he shows that evil things are not brought upon him to correct him like a father chastises his son by discipline, but like extermination by which one destroys enemies. So he then says, "He will flee before the weapons of iron," the present punishments by sustaining impatiently the punishments which wound him at close quarters, like an iron sword. "And he will fall on a bronze bow," in the punishments of the future life which wound from afar like a bronze bow, which cannot be broken, to show the infinite duration of future punishments. He consequently develops the image of this bronze bow saying, "drawn and coming out of its sheath." (Understanding: "Will be that bow") For as long as the bow is in its sheath, it does not strike down. In the same way, the revenge of future damnation does not condemn as long as it remains in the foreknowledge of God like a sheath, but it is taken out of the sheath by malice which provokes God, and then it is brought forth by divine disposition. He shows its effect when he then says, "and flashing for him in his bitterness." For as a bolt of lightning comes from above, suddenly, violently, and brightly, so that vengeance will be born to the sinner by God unexpectedly, with such great violence that he is unable to resist, and with such a clarity of justice that there will be no room for excuses. Because of this the sinner will be filled with bitterness.

Then he clearly shows the same is true in the sin of ravenous gluttony when he says, "Nothing has remained of his food," because whatever he had he turned to his own uses, leaving nothing for the need of others. He then adds the fitting punishment saying, "and so nothing will remain of his goods," for him, because he will lose everything. This is a fitting punishment since he did not want to reserve anything from his goods for others, so it is just that nothing is reserved for him. As to the fact that he consumed superfluous things for his own uses he then adds another fitting punishment saying, "When he is satisfied he will be bloated." Here he uses the comparison of a man who eats too much and whose bowels become bloated because of an excess of food. By this he means the man who expends his superfluous goods for his own uses, or who acquired superfluous things for himself, will suffer a kind of bloating, unable to dispose correctly of all the things he acquired. This is clear in the Gospel of St. Luke concerning the rich man whose fields produced such abundant crops, and who wanted to tear down his barns to build larger ones. (12:18) Inordinate temperance and anxiety follow the bloating of the bowels, and so he then says, "and he will burn with desire." The same is true of those who inordinately amass many possessions for themselves and are afflicted with excessive anxiety. Finally, pain from too much food often comes to all the members of the body as a result of surplus food, and so he adds, "and every pain rushes against him." Likewise, many pains arise for those who have amassed surplus goods when they lose most of them.

Then, as though agreeing now with the opinion of Job, he then speaks also about the punishments of the future life saying, "and his hands will cause him pain," because he will suffer pain in punishments for his sinful works which he did. It is apparent that this retribution of pain must be understood to be after death, when the text adds, "His bones will be full of the vices of his youth and they will sleep with him in the dust," as if to say: Even after death, when his flesh will be dissipated into dust when only his bones remain in the grave, he will suffer punishment for his sins, not only the ones he committed in old age, but also those he committed in his youth a time more susceptible to sin. He shows the reason why he is also punished for sins after death saying, "Since wickedness was sweet in his mouth, he hid it under his tongue." Here he uses the metaphor of a man eating sweet food who does not quickly swallow it, but keeps it in his mouth for a long time so that he may enjoy it longer. To develop this comparison he then says, "he will spare it," the evil or sin which is sweet to him, and does not want to destroy it. He would destroy it, of course, by letting it go, and so the text continues, "he does not leave it." He shows why he does not leave it saying, "and he will keep it hidden in his throat," that is, he will not show it to anyone, and because of this no one will dissuade him from his hidden sin nor apply any cure. This applies to those who confess their sins. The reason why the sins of a man are punished after death is because in life he did not want to give them up.

### **The Second Lesson: The Punishment of the Wicked**

14 His bread is changed in his stomach into the venom of asps within. 15 The riches which he has devoured, he vomit forth; and from his stomach God will cast them out. 16 The asps raise their head, and the tongue of the viper will kill him. 17 Let him not see the stream of the river flowing with butter and honey. 18 He will atone for everything he did, yet he will not be consumed. According to the great number of his stratagems, he will pay his debt. 19 He broke in pieces and stripped the house of the poor, he pillaged the house and did not rebuild it. 20 His belly is not satisfied, and when he has what he desired, he will not be able to possess them. 21 Nothing has remained of his food, and so nothing will remain of his goods. 22 When he is satiated, he will be bloated, he will burn with desire and every pain will rush against him. 23 Would that his belly be filled that he might send on him the anger of his fury and would shower his war upon him. 24 He will flee before the weapons of iron and he will fall on a bronze bow, 25 drawn and coming out of its sheath, and flashing for his bitterness. Terrors will go and come upon him. 26 Utter darkness has invaded his hidden places. Fire will devour him, a fire which is not enkindled, abandoned, he will be afflicted in his tent. 27 The heavens will reveal his evil and the earth will rise against him. 28 The seed of his house will be open and will be carried off in the day of divine vengeance. 29 This is the lot of the evil men given by God and the heritage of his words from God.

Since he had said (v.11) that the bones of the evil man must be filled with the vices of youth, so that he is punished after death he now treats more broadly of his punishments. First, he shows that the goods which he had in this world will change into evils for him. He uses the metaphor of one eating whose food sometimes becomes a cause of evil. This happens in two ways: in one way when food remains undigested in the stomach and is changed into venomous fluids. He expresses this saying, "His bread is changed in his stomach into the venom of asps within," as if to say: As the food eaten sometimes turns into venomous fluids, so the goods which he had in this world and remained until death will change into the bitterness of death for him. Second, the food which has been eaten and if it cannot be digested is sometimes rejected by vomiting it out in disgust and pain. So also it sometimes happens that sinful men lose the temporal goods which they acquire in this world because they do not use them well, by divine judgment painfully like undigested food. So he then says, "The riches which he devoured," which he rapaciously acquired, "he will vomit forth," and will lose them with disgust; "and from his stomach," from his dominion, "God will cast them out," because they will be taken violently from him by divine judgment.

Not only the goods which he possessed will change into evil for him, but also he will suffer evils at the hands of his enemies both in word and in deed. He gives two examples of this. First, he gives the example of the asp which kills by its bite. So he says, "The asps raise their head," against him to bite him. By this he means the head of evildoers, or even Satan himself attacking him. As the second example he gives the viper which distributes its poison with the tongue. So the text continues, "and the tongue of the viper will kill him," by which he means some harmful thing or other comes from the tongue of a man like the poison from the tongue of a viper.

Then he continues with the punishment which is the privation of goods when he then says, "Let him not see the stream of the river flowing with butter and honey." Butter and honey are similar in that both fittingly describe what is sweet to the taste, but honey is produced by bees who collect it from flowers. Butter is produced from the labor of men who take it from the milk of domesticated animals. So honey can mean any enjoyable good whatsoever which comes without the industry of man, whereas butter means any enjoyable good which is produced from human endeavor. A torrent comes on someone immediately and unexpectedly. The river means abundance because of the great quantity of water. The streams mean the distributions of goods. Not everyone has every temporal or spiritual good, but some have the latter and others the former. According to the opinion of Sophar, it is necessary to admit that the sweetness of goods come to good men abundantly and unexpectedly, both from human work and from divine providence without human work but in an ordered distribution. The sinner, he asserts, is deprived of this distribution. Because sometimes man becomes so weak from excessive punishment that he cannot sustain further punishments, he then adds that although the sinner is punished in many ways in this life, yet he is destined for further punishment in the future life. So the text continues, "He will atone for everything he did," since for each and every sin he will suffer punishment, "yet he will not be consumed," in the soul which is reserved for future punishments.

Consequently, he shows us the fitting character of the punishments for blameworthy acts when he then says, "According to the great number of his stratagems," for the sins which he thought about with great care, "he will pay his debt," because the punishment will fit the individual proportion of the sin. First, he clearly demonstrates this in the case of the sin of theft, where he posits two crimes in proper order. The first of these is the violent pillage which he means when he says, "He broke in pieces and stripped the house of the poor," showing violence in breaking it in pieces and theft in stripping it. Second, he puts the lack of restitution, and to this he says, "he pillaged the house and did not rebuild it," as if to say: He neglected to repay what he took from the house or destroyed in breaking it in pieces. He adds the proportionate punishment for this sin when he says, "His belly is not been satisfied," as if to say: Since he stripped the house of the poor (v.19) and did not allow himself to be satisfied with their goods. Therefore his appetite is satisfied neither with the goods which he possesses lawfully nor with those he has acquired unjustly. As Qoheleth says, "The avaricious man will never have enough money, and he who loves riches does not enjoy them." (5:9) As to this second thing he continues, "and when he has what he desired, he will not be able to possess it," because either he will be taken away from them, or they will be taken away from him. This is fitting, because he did not want to restore by his own will the things which he had stolen, he loses them against his will.