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Excerpts from the Book of Job (Chapters 38-42)

The Unravelment In the Consciousness

Chapters 38 through 40:5 The First Speech of Yahweh, and Job's Answer

"Who then darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins as a man: I will question thee, and inform thou me! Where wast thou when I established the earth? . . . Hast thou reached the fountains of the sea, and hast thou gone into the foundation of the deep? . . . Knowest thou the laws of heaven, or dost thou define its influence on the earth? . . . Dost thou hunt for the prey of the lioness and still the desire of the young lions, when they couch in the dens, sit in the thicket lying in wait for prey? . . . Dost thou know the bearing time of the wild goats of the rock? . . . Will the oryx be willing to serve thee, or will he lodge in thy crib? . . . Dost thou give to the horse strength? . . . Dost the hawk fly by thy wisdom, doth it spread its wings towards the south? Or is it at thy command that the eagle soareth aloft and buildeth its nest on high? . . . Will now the censurer contend with the Almighty? Let the instructor of Eloah answer it!" (Job 38:2-40:2)

[Then Job answered Yahweh, and said:] *"Behold, I am too mean: what shall I answer Thee? I lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, and will not begin again; and twice--I will do it no more." (Job 40:3-5)*

Is not the divine speech altogether different from what one ought to expect? One expects to hear from the mouth of Yahweh something unheard of in the previous course of the drama, and in this expectation we find ourselves disappointed at the outset. For one need only look back and read 9:4-10, where Job acknowledges and describes God as a wise and mighty Lord over the natural works, especially as an irresistible Ruler over everything great in it; 12:7-10, where he refers to the creatures of the sky and deep as proofs of God's creative power; 12:11-25, where he sketches the grandest picture of God's terrible doings in nature and among men; 26:5-14, where he praises God as the Creator and Lord of all things, and describes what he says concerning Him as only a faint echo of the thunder of His might; 28:23 sqq., where he ascribes absolute wisdom to Him as the Creator and Ruler of the world. If one ponders these passages of Job's speeches, he will not be able to say that the speech of Yahweh, in the exhibition of the creative power and wisdom of God, which is its theme, would make Job conscious of anything which was previously unknown to him. And it is accordingly asked, What, then, is there that is new in the speech of Yahweh by which the great effect is brought about, that Job humbles himself in penitence and becomes ready for the act of redemption which follows?

It has indeed never occurred to Job to desire to enter into a controversy with God

concerning the works of creation. He is far from the delusion of being able to stand such a test. He knows in general that if God were willing to contend with him, he would not be able to answer God one in a thousand (9:3). And yet God closely questioned him, and thereby Job comes to the perception of his sin--how comes it to pass? Has the plot of the drama perhaps failed in this point? Has the poet made use of means unsuited to the connection of the whole to bring about the needful effect, viz. the repentance of Job, because, perhaps, the store of his thoughts was exhausted? But this poet is not so poor; and we shall therefore be obliged to try and understand the disposition of the speech of Yahweh before we censure it.

When one of Job's last words before the appearing of Yahweh was the word **שְׂדֵי יְעֹנֵי** [let the Almighty answer me], Job thereby desired God's decision concerning the testimony of his innocence. This wish is in itself not sinful. Yea, it is even a fruit of his hidden faith when he casts the look of hope away from his affliction, and the accusation of the friends, into the future to God as his Vindicator and Redeemer. But that wish becomes sinful when he looks upon his affliction as a *de facto* accusation on the part of God, because he cannot think of suffering and sin as separable; and because he is conscious of his innocence, [he] looks upon it as a decree of God, his opponent and his enemy, which is irreconcilable with the divine justice. This Job's condition of conflict and temptation is the prevailing one; his faith is beclouded and breaks through the night which hangs over him only in single rays. The result of this condition of conflict is the sinful character which that wish assumes. It becomes a challenge to God, since Job directs against God Himself the accusation which the friends have directed against him, and asserts his ability to carry through his good cause even if God would enter with him into a judicial contention.

This defiance is, however, not common godlessness. On the contrary, Job is really the innocent servant of God, and his defiant tone is only the result of a false conception which the tempted one indulges respecting the Author of his affliction. So, then, this defiance has not taken full possession of Job's mind. On the contrary, the faith which lays firm hold on confidence in the God whom he does not comprehend is in conflict against it; and this conflict tends in the course of the drama, the nearer it comes to the catastrophe, still nearer to the victory, which only awaits a decisive stroke in order to be complete.

Therefore Yahweh yields to Job's longing **שְׂדֵי יְעֹנֵי** [let the Almighty answer me], in as far as He really answers Job. And even that this takes place, and that, although out of the storm, it nevertheless takes place, not in a way to crush and destroy but to instruct and convince, and displaying a loving condescension, is an indirect manifestation that Job is not regarded by God as an evil-doer mature for judgment. But that folly and temerity by which the servant of God is become unlike himself must notwithstanding be destroyed. And before Job can realize God as his Witness and Redeemer, in which character his faith in its brighter moments has foreseen Him, his sinful censuring and blaming of God must be blotted out by penitence; and with it at the same time his foolish imagination, by which his faith has been almost overwhelmed, must be destroyed, viz. the imagination that his affliction is a *hostile* dispensation of God.

And by what means is Job brought to the penitent recognition of his gloomy judgment concerning the divine decree and of his contending with God? Is it, perhaps, by God's admitting to him what really is the case; that he does not suffer as a sinner the punishment of his sin, but showing at the same time that the decree of suffering is not an unjust one because its design is not hostile? No, indeed, for Job is not worthy that his cause should be acknowledged on the part of God before he has come to a penitent recognition of the wrong by which he has sinned against God. God would be encouraging self-righteousness if He should give Job the testimony of his innocence before the sin of vain-glory, into which Job has fallen in the consciousness of his innocence, is changed to *humility*, by which all uprightness that is acceptable with God is tested. Therefore, contrary to expectation, God begins to speak with Job about totally different matters from His justice or injustice in reference to his affliction.

Therein already lies a deep humiliation for Job. But a still deeper one in God's turning, as it were, to the *abecedarium naturae*, and putting the censurer of His doings to the blush. That God is the almighty and all-wise Creator and Ruler of the world, that the natural world is exalted above human knowledge and power and is full of marvelous divine creations and arrangements, full of things mysterious and incomprehensible to ignorant and feeble man, Job knows even before God speaks; and yet he must now hear it because he does not know it rightly. For the nature with which he is acquainted as the herald of the creative and governing power of God is also the preacher of humility; and exalted as God the Creator and Ruler of the natural world is above Job's censure, so is He also as the Author of his affliction.

That which is new, therefore, in the speech of Yahweh is not the proof of God's exaltation in itself, but the relation to the mystery of his affliction, and to his conduct towards God in this his affliction, in which Job is necessitated to place perceptions not in themselves strange to him. He who cannot answer a single one of those questions taken from the natural kingdom, but on the contrary must everywhere admit and adore the power and wisdom of God--he must appear as an insignificant fool if he applies them to his limited judgment concerning the Author of his affliction.

The fundamental tone of the divine speech is the thought that the divine working in nature is infinitely exalted above human knowledge and power, and that consequently man must renounce all claim to better knowledge and right of contention in the presence of the divine dispensations. But at the same time, within the range of this general thought it is also in particular shown, [1] how nature reflects the goodness of God as well as His wisdom (He has restrained the destructive power of the waters, He also sendeth rain upon the steppe though untenanted by man); [2] how that which accomplishes the purposes for which it was in itself designed serves higher purposes in the moral order of the world (the dawn of day puts an end to the works of darkness, snow and hail serve as instruments of divine judgments); [3] how divine providence extends to all creatures and always according to their need (He provides the lion its prey, He satisfies the ravens that cry to Him); and [4] how He has distributed His manifold gifts in a way often paradoxical to man but in truth worthy of admiration (to the steinbock ease in bringing forth and growth without toil, to the wild ass freedom, to the antelope untameable fleetness, to the

ostrich freedom from anxiety about its young and swiftness, to the horse heroic and proud lust for the battle, to the hawk the instinct of migration, to the eagle a lofty nest and a piercing sight). Everywhere the wonders of God's power and wisdom, and in fact of His goodness abounding in power and His providence abounding in wisdom, infinitely transcend Job's knowledge and capacity.

Job cannot answer one of all these questions, but yet he feels to what end they are put to him. The God who sets bounds to the sea, who refreshes the desert, who feeds the ravens, who cares for the gazelle in the wilderness and the eagle in its eyrie, is the same God who now causes him seemingly thus unjustly to suffer. But if the former is worthy of adoration, the latter will also be so. Therefore Job confesses that he will henceforth keep silence, and solemnly promises that he will now no longer contend with Him. From the marvelous in nature he divines that which is marvelous in his affliction. His humiliation under the mysteries of nature is at the same time humiliation under the mystery of his affliction. And only now, when he penitently reveres the mystery he has hitherto censured, is it time that its inner glory should be unveiled to him. The bud is mature and can now burst forth in order to disclose the blended colors of its matured beauty.

Chapters 40:6 through 42:6
The Second Speech of Yahweh
and Job's Second Penitent Answer

This second time also Yahweh speaks to Job out of the storm; not, however, in wrath, but in the profound condescension of His majesty, in order to deliver His servant from dark imaginings and to bring him to free and joyous knowledge. He does not demand blind subjection but free submission. He does not extort an acknowledgment of His greatness, but it is effected by persuasion. It becomes manifest that God is much more forbearing and compassionate than men. Observe the friends, the defenders of the divine honor, these sticklers for their own orthodoxy, how they rave against Job! How much better is it to fall into the hands of the living God than into the hands of man! For God is truth and love. But men have at one time love without truth, at another truth without love, since they either connive at one or anathematize him. Moreover, when a man who is a servant of God, like Job, fails in one point or sins, men at once condemn him altogether and admit nothing good in him. God, however, discerns between good and evil, and makes the good a means of freeing the man from the evil. He also does not go rashly to work but waits like an instructor until the time of action arrives. How long He listens to Job's bold challenging and keeps silence! And then, when He does begin to speak, He does not cast Job to the ground by His authoritative utterances, but deals with him as a child. He examines him from the catechism of nature, and allows him to say for himself that he fails in this examination. In this second speech He acts with him as in the well-known poem of Hans Sachs with St. Peter: He offers him to take the government of the world for once instead of Himself. Here also He produces conviction. Here also His mode of action is a deep lowering of Himself. It is Yahweh, the God, who at length begets Himself in humanity in order to convince men of His love.

"Gird up thy loins manfully: I will question thee, and do thou answer me! Wilt thou altogether annul my right, condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? And hast thou then an arm like God, and canst thou with the voice thunder like Him? . . . Behold now the behemoth, which I have made with thee . . . He bendeth his tail like a cedar branch, the sinews of his legs are firmly interwoven. His bones are like tubes of brass, his bones like bars of iron. . . . Dost thou draw the crocodile by a hoop-net, and dost thou sink his tongue into the line?! Canst thou put a rush-ring into his nose and pierce his cheeks with a hook? . . . Wilt thou play with him as a little bird, and bind him for thy maidens? . . . And who is it who could stand before Me? Who hath given Me anything first of all that I must requite it? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven in Mine." (Job 40:7-41:3)

[Then Job answered Yahweh, and said:]

"Now I know that Thou canst do all things, and no plan is impracticable to Thee. . . . Thus have I judged without understanding, what was too wonderful for me, without knowing. O hear now, and I will speak: I will ask Thee, and instruct Thou me. I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, and now mine eye hath seen Thee. Therefore I am sorry, and I repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6)

After Job has answered the first speech of Yahweh by a confession of penitence, the second can have no other purpose but that of strengthening the conviction which urges to this confession, and of deepening the healthful tone from which it proceeds. The object of censure here is no longer Job's contending with Yahweh in general, but Job's contending with Yahweh on account of the prosperity of the evil-doer, which is irreconcilable with divine justice; that contending by which the sufferer, in spite of the shadow which affliction casts upon him, supported the assertion of his own righteousness. Here also, as a result, the refutation follows in the only way consistent with the dignity of Yahweh, and so that Job must believe in order to perceive, and does not perceive in order not to be obliged to believe. Without arguing the matter with Job as to why many things in the government of the world are thus and not rather otherwise, Yahweh challenges Job to take the government of the world into his own hand and to give free course to his wrath, to cast down everything that is exalted and to render the evil-doer forever harmless. By thus thinking of himself as the ruler of the world, Job is obliged to recognize the cutting contrast of his feebleness and the divine rule, with which he has ventured to find fault. At the same time, however, he is taught that--what he would never be able to do--God really punishes the ungodly; and must have wise purposes when--which He indeed might do--He does not allow the floods of His wrath to be poured forth immediately.

To show Job how little capable he is of governing the world, and how little he would be in a position to execute judgment on the evil-doer, two creatures are described to him, two unslain monsters of gigantic structure and invincible strength which defy all human attack. These two descriptions are, we think, designed to teach Job how little capable of passing sentence upon the evil-doer he is, who cannot even draw a cord through the nose of the behemoth, and who, if he once attempted to attack the leviathan would have reason to remember it so long as he lived, and would henceforth let it alone. It is perhaps an

emblem that is not without connection with the book of Job that these **בהמות** [*behemoth*, a plural noun, 40:15] and **לויתן** [*leviathan*, a singular noun, 41:1] (**תנין** [sea monster, 7:12]) in the language of the Prophets and the Psalms are the symbols of a worldly power at enmity with the God of redemption and His people. And wherefore should Job's confession (42:2) not be suitably attached to the completed description of the leviathan, especially as the description is divided into two parts by the utterances of Yahweh (41:2,3) which retrospectively and prospectively set it in the right light for Job?

Chapter 42:7-17 ***The Unravelment in Outward Reality***

Job's confession and tone of penitence are now perfected. He acknowledges the divine omnipotence which acts according to a wisely-devised scheme, in opposition to his total ignorance and feebleness. A world of divine wisdom, of wondrous thoughts of God now lies before him, concerning which he knows nothing of himself, but would gladly learn a vast amount by the medium of divine instruction. To these mysteries his affliction also belongs. He perceives it now to be a wise decree of God, beneath which he adoringly bows; but it is nevertheless a mystery to him. Sitting in dust and ashes, he feels a deep contrition for the violence with which he has roughly handled and shaken the mystery-- now will it continue, that he bows beneath the enshrouded mystery? No, the final teaching of the book is not that God's rule demands *faith* before everything else. The final teaching is that sufferings are for the righteous man the way to glory, and that his faith is the way to sight. The most craving desire, for the attainment of which Job hopes where his faith breaks forth from under the ashes, is this--that he will once more behold God, even if he should succumb to his affliction. This desire is granted him ere he yields. For he who hitherto has only heard of Yahweh can now say: **עתה עיני ראתך** [now my eye has seen you]; his perception of God has entered upon an entirely new stage. But first of all God has only borne witness of Himself to him, to call him to repentance. Now, however, since the rust of pollution is purged away from Job's pure soul, He can also appear as his Vindicator and Redeemer. After all that was sinful in his speeches is blotted out by repentance, there remains only the truth of his innocence, which God Himself testifies to him, and the truth of his holding fast to God in the hot battle of temptation, by which, without his knowing it, he has frustrated the design of Satan.

"And it came to pass, after Yahweh had spoken these words to Job, that Yahweh said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee and thy two friends: for ye have not spoken what is correct in reference to Me, as My servant Job." (Job 42:7)

In order that they may only maintain the justice of God, they have condemned Job against their better knowledge and conscience. Therefore they have abandoned truth in favor of the justice of God--a defense which, as Job has told the friends, God abhors. Nevertheless He is willing to be gracious.

"And now take unto you seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer an offering for yourselves, and Job My servant shall pray for you; only his person will I accept, that I recompense not unto you your folly: for ye have not spoken what is correct in reference to Me, as My servant Job." (Job 42:8)

That "correct" in Job's speeches consists of his having denied that affliction is always a punishment of sin, and in his holding fast the consciousness of his innocence without suffering himself to be persuaded of the opposite. That denial was correct; and this truthfulness was more precious to God than the untruthfulness of the friends who were zealous for the honor of God.

After Job has penitently acknowledged his error, God decides between him and the friends according to his previous supplicatory wish (16:21). And the servant of Yahweh is not only favored himself, but he also becomes the instrument of grace to sinners. As where his faith shone forth he became the prophet of his own and the friends' future, so now he is the priestly mediator between the friends and God.

"Then Eliphaz of Teman, and Bildad of Shuach, [and] Zophar of Naamah, went forth and did as Yahweh had said to them; and Yahweh accepted the person of Job." (Job 42:9)

Yahweh has now risen up as a witness for Job, the spiritual redemption is already accomplished. And all that is wanting is that He who has acknowledged and testified to Job as His servant should also act outwardly and visibly, and in mercy show Himself the righteous One.

"And Yahweh turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends; and Yahweh increased everything that Job had possessed to the double. Then came to him all his brothers, and all his sisters, and all his former acquaintances, and ate bread with him in his house . . . and each one gave him a Kesita, and each a golden ring." (Job 42:10-11)

Prosperity now brought those together again whom calamity had frightened away; for the love of men is scarcely anything but a number of coarse or delicate shades of selfishness. Now they all come and rejoice at Job's prosperity, viz. in order to bask therein. He, however, does not thrust them back; for the judge concerning the final motives of human love is God, and love which is shown to us is certainly more worthy of thanks than hatred. They are his guests again, and he leaves them to their own shame. And now their tongues, that were halting thus far, are all at once become eloquent. They mingle congratulations and comfort with their expressions of sorrow at his past misfortune. It is now an easy matter that no longer demands their faith. They even bring him each one a present. In everything it is manifest that Yahweh has restored His servant to honor. Everything is now subordinated to him who was accounted as one forsaken of God.

And he had seven sons and three daughters." (Job 42:13)

Instead of the seven sons and three daughters which he had, he receives just the same again, which is also so far a doubling, as deceased children also, according to the Old

Testament view, are not absolutely lost (2 Sam. 12:23). The author of this book, in everything to the most minute thing consistent, here gives us to understand that with men who die and depart from us the relation is different from that with things which we have lost.

"And Job died, old, and weary of life." (Job 42:17)

A New Testament poet would have closed the book of Job differently. He would have shown us how, becoming free from his inward conflict of temptation, and being divinely comforted, Job succumbs to his disease but waves his palm of victory before the throne of God among the innumerable hosts of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The Old Testament poet, however, could begin his book with a celestial scene, but not end it with the same. True, in some passages, which are like New Testament luminous points in the Old Testament poem, Job dares to believe and to hope that God will indeed acknowledge him after death. But this is a purely individual aspiration of faith--the extreme of hope which comes forth against the extreme of fear. The unravelment does not correspond to this aspiration.

The view of heaven which a Christian poet would have been able to give at the close of the book is only rendered possible by the resurrection and ascension of Christ. So far, what Oehler in his essay on the Old Testament Wisdom (1854, S. 28) says, in opposition to those who think the book of Job is directed against the Mosaic doctrine of retribution, is true: that, on the contrary, the issue of the book sanctions the present life phase of this doctrine anew. But the comfort which this theologically and artistically incomparable book presents to us is substantially none other than that of the New Testament. For the final consolation of every sufferer is not dependent upon the working of good genii in the heavens but has its seat in God's love, without which even heaven would become a very hell. Therefore the book of Job is also a book of consolation for the New Testament church. From it we learn that we have not only to fight with flesh and blood, but with the prince of this world, and to accomplish our part in the conquest of evil, to which, from Gen. 3:15 onwards, the history of the world tends. This faith and avenging justice are absolutely distinct opposites; that the right kind of faith clings to divine love in the midst of the feeling of wrath; that the incomprehensible ways of God always lead to a glorious issue; and that the suffering of the present time is far outweighed by the future glory--a glory not always revealed in this life and visibly future, but the final glory above. The nature of faith, the mystery of the cross, the right practice of the care of souls--this, and much besides, the church learns from the book, the whole teaching of which can never be thoroughly learned and completely exhausted.