

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Job reproves the boasting of his friends, and shows their uncharitableness towards himself, Job 12:1-5; asserts that even the tabernacles of robbers prosper; and that, notwithstanding, God is the Governor of the world; a truth which is proclaimed by all parts of the creation whether animate or inanimate, and by the revolutions which take place in states, vv. 6-25.

Verse 2

No doubt but ye are the people - Doubtless ye are the wisest men in the world; all wisdom is concentrated in you; and when ye die, there will no more be found on the face of the earth! This is a strong irony.

Verse 3

I am not inferior to you - I do not fall short of any of you in understanding, wisdom, learning, and experience.

Who knoweth not such things as these? - All your boasted wisdom consists only in strings of proverbs which are in every person's mouth, and are no proof of wisdom and experience in them that use them.

Verse 4

I am as one mocked of his neighbor - Though I am invoking God for help and salvation, yet my friends mock me in this most solemn and sacred work. But God answereth me.

The just upright man is laughed to scorn - This is a very difficult verse, on which no two critics seem to be agreed. Mr. Good translates the fourth and fifth verses thus: -

“Thus brother is become a laughing-stock to his companions,
While calling upon God that he would succor him.

The just, the perfect man, is a laughing-stock to the proud,
A derision amidst the sunshine of the prosperous,
While ready to slip with his foot.

For a vindication of this version, I must refer to his notes. Coverdale gives at least a good sense. Thus he that calleth upon God, and whom God heareth, is mocked of his neighbour: the godly and innocent man is laughed to scorn. Godlynesse is a light despysed in the hertes of the rich; and is set for them to stamble upon. The fifth verse is thus rendered by Mr. Parkhurst: “A torch of contempt, or contemptible link, (see Isaiah 7:4; Isaiah 40:2, Isaiah 40:3), xœxçx©xªx•xª (leashtoth), to the splendours of the prosperous (is he who is) ready (x x)x•xÝ (nachon), Job 15:23; Job 18:12; Psalm 38:17) to slip with his foot.” The general sense is tolerably plain; but to emendations and conjectures there is no end.

Verse 6

The tabernacles of robbers prosper - Those who live by the plunder of their neighbors are often found in great secular prosperity; and they that provoke God by impiety and blasphemy live in a state of security and affluence. These are administrations of Providence which cannot be accounted for; yet the Judge of all the earth does right. Therefore prosperity and adversity are no evidences of a man's spiritual state, nor of the place he holds in the approbation or disapprobation of God.

Verse 7

But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee - Mr. Good's paraphrase here is very just: “Why tell ye me that the Almighty hath brought this calamity upon me? Every thing in nature, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the heaven, every inhabitant of earth and sea, and every thing that befalls them, are the work of his hands; and every thing feels and acknowledges him to be the universal Creator and Controller. It is the common doctrine of all nature; but to apply it as ye would apply it to me, and to assert that I am suffering from being guilty of hypocrisy, is equally impertinent. He ordains every thing in wisdom as well as in power; but why events happen as they happen, why good and evil are promiscuously scattered throughout nature or human life, ye are as ignorant of as myself.”

Verse 10

In whose hand is the soul of every living thing - x xªx© x)xœ x—x™ (nephesh col chai), “the soul of all life.”

And the breath of all mankind - x•x”x•x— x)xœ x’x©x” (veruach col besar), “and the spirit or breath of all

flesh.â€ Does not the first refer to the immortal soul, the principle of all intellectual life; and the latter to the breath, respiration, the grand means by which animal existence is continued? See Job 10:1.

Verse 11

Doth not the ear try words? - All these are common-place sayings. Ye have advanced nothing new; ye have cast no light upon the dispensations of Providence.

Verse 12

With the ancient is wisdom - Men who have lived in those primitive times, when the great facts of nature were recent, such as the creation, fall, flood, confusion of tongues, migration of families, and consequent settlement of nations, had much knowledge from those facts; and their length of days - the many hundreds of years to which they lived, gave them such an opportunity of accumulating wisdom by experience, that they are deservedly considered as oracles.

Verse 13

With him is wisdom and strength - But all these things come from God; he is the Fountain of wisdom and the Source of power. He alone can give us unerring counsel, and understanding to comprehend and act profitably by it. See on Job 12:16 (note).

Verse 14

He breaketh down - He alone can create, and he alone can destroy. Nothing can be annihilated but by the same Power that created it. This is a most remarkable fact. No power, skill, or cunning of man can annihilate the smallest particle of matter. Man, by chemical agency, may change its form; but to reduce it to nothing belongs to God alone. In the course of his providence God breaks down, so that it cannot be built up again. See proofs of this in the total political destruction of Nineveh, Babylon, Persepolis, Tyre, and other cities, which have broken down never to be rebuilt; as well as the Assyrian, Babylonian, Grecian, and Roman empires, which have been dismembered and almost annihilated, never more to be regenerated.

He shutteth up a man - He often frustrates the best laid purposes, so that they can never be brought to good effect.

Verse 15

He withholdeth the waters - This is, I think, an allusion to the third dayâ€™s work of the creation, Genesis 1:9: And God said, Let the waters be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear. Thus the earth was drained, and the waters collected into seas, and bound to their particular places.

Also he sendeth them out - Here is also an allusion to the flood, for when he broke up the fountains of the great deep, then the earth was overturned.

Verse 16

With him is strength and wisdom - $\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}-\text{x}\text{o}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}\text{o}\text{x}\text{c}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}$ ” (oz vethushiyah), strength and sufficiency. Strength or power, springing from an exhaustless and infinite source of potency. In the thirteenth verse it is said, With him is wisdom and strength; but the expressions are not the same, $\text{x}-\text{x}\text{o}\text{x}\text{z}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}$ ” $\text{x}\text{o}\text{x}'\text{x}'\text{x}\text{o}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}$ ” (chochmah ugeburah), intelligence and fortitude, or strength in action, the wisdom ever guiding the exertions of power; but here is strength or power in essence, and an eternal potentiality. With him is every excellence, in potentia and in esse. He borrows nothing, he derives nothing. As he is self-existent, so is he self-sufficient. We have had the word tushiyah before. See the note on Job 11:6.

The deceived and the deceiver are his - Some think this refers to the fall; even Satan the deceiver or beguiler, and Adam and Eve, the deceived or beguiled, are his. Satan, as this book shows, cannot act without especial permission; and man, whom the seducer thought to make his own property for ever, is claimed as the peculium or especial property of God, for the seed of the woman was then appointed to bruise the head of the serpent; and Jesus Christ has assumed the nature of man, and thus brought human nature into a state of fellowship with himself. Thus he who sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren; Hebrews 2:11.

Verse 17

He leadeth counsellors away spoiled - The events of war are also in his hand. It is he who gives victory; through him even the counsellors - the great men and chief men, are often led into captivity, and found among the spoils.

And maketh the judges fools - He infatuates the judges. Does this refer to the foolish conduct of some of the Israelitish judges, such as Samson?

Verse 18

He looseth the bond of kings - He takes away their splendid robes, and clothes them with sackcloth; or, he dissolves their authority, permits their subjects to rebel and overthrow the state, to bind them as captives, and despoil them of all power, authority, and liberty. Many proofs of this occur in the Israelitish history and in the history of the principal nations of the earth, and not a few in the history of Britain.

Verse 19

He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty - What multitudes of proofs of this does the history of the world present! Even the late disastrous war with the French republic and empire, which began in 1793, and continued without intermission till 1814, was afterwards renewed, and had a catastrophe that went nearly to ruin Europe. How many princes, or rather priests, כֹּהֲנִים (cohanim), have been spoiled of their power, influence, and authority; and how many mighty men - captains, generals, admirals, etc., have been overthrown! But supposing that the writer of the Book of Job lived, as some think, after the captivity, how many priests were led away spoiled, both from Israel and Judah; and how many kings and mighty men were overthrown in the disastrous wars between the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Jews!

Verse 20

He removeth away the speech of the trusty - The faithful counsellor and the eloquent orator avail nothing: Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat; æGod infatuates those whom he is determined to destroy.æ The writer might have had his eyes on Isaiah 3:1-3, which the reader will do well to consult.

The understanding of the aged - זְקֵנִים (zekenim) signifies the same here as our word elders or elder-men; which includes in itself the two ideas of seniority, or considerably advanced age, and official authority. These can do no more to save a state which God designs to destroy, notwithstanding their great political wisdom and knowledge, than the child who can neither reason nor speak.

Verse 21

He poureth contempt upon princes - נְדִיבִים (nedibim), æthose of royal extraction;æ widely different from the כֹּהֲנִים (cohanim) mentioned Job 12:19.

Weakeneth the strength of the mighty - אֲפִיקִים (aphikim), the compact; the well-strung together; the nervous and sinewy. Perhaps there is a reference here to the crocodile, as the same term is applied, Job 40:13, to the compactness of his bones: and as רִפְּיָהּ מֵזִיָּא (rippah meziach), which we translate weakeneth the strength, signifies more properly looseth the girdle, as the margin has properly rendered it, the reference seems still more pointed; for it is known that æthe crocodile, from the shoulders to the extremity of the tail, is covered with large square scales, disposed like parallel girdles, fifty-two in number. In the middle of each girdle are four protuberances, which become higher as they approach the end of the tail, and compose four rows.æ See the quotation in Parkhurst, under the word אֲפִיקִים drow eh (aphak). What is human strength against this? We may say as the Lord said, Job 40:19: He that made him can make his sword to approach unto him. He alone can loose the girdles of this mighty one.

Verse 22

He discovereth deep things out of darkness - This may refer either to God's works in the great deep, or to the plots and stratagems of wicked men, conspiracies that were deeply laid, well digested, and about to be produced into existence, when death, whose shadow had hitherto concealed them, is to glut himself with carnage.

Verse 23

He increaseth the nations - Mr. Good translates, He letteth the nations grow licentious. Pride, fullness of bread, with extensive trade and commerce, produce luxury; and this is ever accompanied with profligacy of manners. When, then, the cup of this iniquity is full, God destroys the nation, by bringing or permitting to come against it a nation less pampered, more necessitous, and inured to toil.

He enlargeth the nations - Often permits a nation to acquire an accession of territory, and afterwards shuts them up within their ancient boundaries, and often contracts even those. All these things seem to occur as natural events, and the consequences of state intrigues, and such like causes; but when Divine inspiration comes to pronounce upon them, they are shown to be the consequence of God's acting in his judgment and mercy; for it is by him that kings reign; it is he who putteth down one and raiseth up another.

Verse 24

He taketh away the heart of the chief - Suddenly deprives the leaders of great counsels, or mighty armies of courage; so that, panic-struck, they flee when none pursueth, or are confounded when about to enter on the accomplishment of important designs.

And causeth them to wander in a wilderness - A plain allusion to the journeyings of the Israelites in the deserts of Arabia, on their way to the promised land. Their chief, Aaron, had his courage all taken away by the clamors of the people; and so made them a molten calf to be the object of their worship, which defection from God was the cause of their wandering nearly forty years in the trackless wilderness. The reference is so marked, that it scarcely admits of a doubt; yet Houbigant and some others have called it in question, and suppose that those chiefs or heads of families which led out colonies into distant parts are principally intended. It answers too well to the case of the Israelites in the wilderness to admit of any other interpretation.

Verse 25

They grope in the dark - The writer seems to have had his eye on those words of Moses, Deuteronomy 28:28, Deuteronomy 28:29: The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart; and thou shalt Grope At Noonday, as the Blind Gropeth In Darkness. And this also may refer to the unaccountable errors, transgressions, and judicial blindness of the Israelites in their journeying to the promised land: but it will apply also to the state of wicked nations under judicial blindness. The writer is principally indebted for his imagery, and indeed for the chief expressions used here, to Psalm 107:27: They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man. Psalm 107:39, Psalm 107:40: Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. He Poureth Contempt Upon Princes, and Causeth Them To Wonder In The Wilderness, where there is No Way. Mr. Good has some judicious reflections on this chapter, particularly on Job 12:13-22: "It should be observed," says he, "that the entire passage has a reference to the machinery of a regular and political government; and that its general drift is to imprint on the mind of the hearer the important doctrine that the whole of the constituent principles of such a government, its officers and institutions; its monarchs and princes; its privy-counselors, judges, and ministers of state; its chieftains, public orators, and assembly of elders; its nobles, or men of hereditary rank; and its stout robust peasantry, as we should express it in the present day; nay, the deep designing villains that plot in secret its destruction; - that the nations themselves, and the heads or sovereigns of the nations, are all and equally in the hands of the Almighty: that with him human pomp is poverty; human excellence, turpitude; human judgment, error; human wisdom, folly; human dignity, contempt; human strength, weakness."