



ONE

to Tell the Tale



~ *A Sonnet Collection* ~

poetry by Renée Oelschlaeger

*inspired by
The Book of Job*



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ONE TO TELL THE TALE, A Sonnet Collection

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Author's Note



One to Tell the Tale is a compilation of original sonnets rising out of my personal Bible study. The Old Testament *Book of Job* offers an intriguing glimpse at divine conversations. The Book dares to ask (and *eventually*, to address) essential questions of Life.

As Job's destruction unfolds in chapter 1, a captivating theme emerges: *One escaped to tell the tale*. Though the phrase won't be repeated after the first chapter, the narrative reveals Job's profound encounter with the Almighty as well as the very personal story of Job's survival.

While these sonnets are designed to provoke thought, I urge readers – *first and foremost* – to engage your hearts and minds with the *Book of Job* itself. May you clearly understand truths articulated in Job 19 “*I know that my redeemer lives,*” and “*in my flesh I will see God.*”

One caveat: given the uniqueness of Job 38-42 (where God Himself takes center stage to declare His majesty), I've used paraphrase in those particular sonnets to express (with poetic effect) what God tells Job and his comforters. Lest there be any ambiguity, I would never add to nor detract from holy writ. God's Word is the ultimate authority; my poetry is but a humble offering to the Creator and Author of all.

- RLO





*“Job is one of the greatest
masterpieces of the human mind.
It is, perhaps, the greatest masterpiece.
Tomorrow, if all literature was
to be destroyed, and it was left to me
to retain one work only,
I should save Job.”*

~ Victor Hugo

Scribner's Magazine, Volume 12
July - December 1892
page 570





The Quandary

A *question unresolved:* If God's a God
Of love and mercy, why must righteous man
Endure affliction, yield to poke and prod,
Submit to the Divine, endorse His plan?
Where's love? Where's mercy? Where's the goodness we
Expect from One so high as He? *Explain!*
What disconnect incites the Deity
To chasten those He loves, to levy pain?
Should man resist the unseen Hand that strikes
The crushing blow ... or stiffen his belief
That *good* accrues from purpose-driven pikes?
(*Distress drives man to welcome his relief?*)
Beset by trials, heinous and extreme,
Job squelched his inclination to blaspheme.



Setting the Stage

from JOB 1 : 1-5

“*T*here was a man named *Job*,” the epic tale
Begins. Renowned throughout the land of Uz,
This upright man feared God. He didn’t fail
To turn from evil everywhere it was.
With seven sons, three daughters born to him,
He drank abundance from a cup of life
Awash with Heaven’s blessings to the brim.
He happily indulged his kids and wife.
Job’s wealth included female donkeys, sheep,
A multitude of camels, oxen, and
The horde of servants laboring to keep
A fair account of livestock, houses, land.
The *greatest* man of all men in the east,
Job worshiped God and served as family priest.



First Conversation

from JOB 1: 6 - 8

The story shifts a momentary gaze
Away from Job ... to spotlight distant quay
Where sons of God convene in fixed arrays
Before their holy God, the One in Three.
... Amid angelic ranks, the Spoiler stood,
An adversary whom the Lord addressed:
“From what place have you come, pernicious Hood?”
The Devil swaggered up, puffed out his chest.
*“I’ve roamed about the Earth, stalking hither
And yon.”* He stretched his y-shaped tongue full length
And mimicked an infernal snake-like slither.
“The humans crumble when I show my strength!”
“Have you considered Job?” the Lord began.
“My servant Job’s an upright, blameless man.”



The Complaint

from JOB 1 : 9 - 10

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan sneered.

“You’ve set a hedge around him ... every side!

It’s not as if the man has persevered –

You’ve coddled him! No wonder he’s allied

With you! Subordinates defend his house,

His wealth compounds as you increase his lands.

His goods accumulate ... Why would he grouse

When you reward all output from his hands?

So let’s get one thing straight – the man’s no saint.

His piety’s the damnedest ballyhoo.

He fools his kin with calculated feint,

But I’m surprised! It seems he’s hoodwinked you!

Don’t fault me when the brutal facts come out ...

Your servant Job’s bombastic, not devout!”



Permission Granted

from JOB 1 : 11 - 12

“Take all he has! I dare you! Make Job hurt!

He’s soft,” the Devil charged, “a sinecure.

If you would thrash him now and not divert

Your hand, he’d curse you! Job would not endure.”

The Lord of Hosts appeared to shake His head,

Unmoved by hubris streaming from the tongue

Of known deceiver. Not a single thread

Of truth emerged from accusations strung.

The Lord told Satan, “*You have my consent*

To trouble Job. Exert your will against

My servant, unleash your wicked hellbent

Schemes. But heed me. When evil is dispensed,

Don’t touch the man.” Much more he wished to do

But Satan snarled and hastily withdrew.



The First Wave

from JOB 1 : 13 - 19

Berserk, the Devil galvanized his worst
Instincts. *“I’ll strip Job naked, make him fail!”*
The Liar slaughtered cattle, servants first,
... But one alone escaped to tell the tale.
A fiery blast consumed Job’s flocks of sheep.
Chaldean swordsmen struck like midnight hail
To leave his servants butchered in a heap
... Yet one alone escaped to tell the tale.
His seven sons, three daughters set a feast
But as they gathered, one ferocious gale
Destroyed the house with all inside deceased
... One servant yet escaped to tell the tale.
Successive blows from each catastrophe
Torpedoed Job’s idyllic, waveless sea.



The Beginning of Grief

from JOB 1 : 20 - 22

Though shaken by each wave of ghastly news,
Job recognized God's hand in his affairs.
Devout in faith and steered by noble virtues,
He practiced sacred rites and daily prayers.
Now, overcome by grief, he tore his clothes
To rags. The mournful man sat down and shaved
His head clear to the scalp. Despite his woes,
Job worshiped God and never misbehaved.
*"When hardships seem too tough to counteract,
My nakedness divulges what is left:
The Giver owns the option to subtract -
I'll honor Him though beggared and bereft."*
Subdued by grief on grief, Job didn't sin
Or blame God for his loss of house and kin.



Second Conversation

from JOB 2 : 1 - 3

Again, the angels stood before the throne
In preparation for their Lord's review.
When Satan sauntered in, a stifled groan
Swept through angelic ranks ... the tension grew.
Sworn enemy of God, the Liar hissed
And turned to face the Lord. *"Where have you been?"*
God asked - as if the two were friends. *"You've missed
Our gatherings! Too busy sowing sin?"*
The Devil bragged, *"I've roamed, both to and fro
Across the earth, destruction in my wake."*
The Maker said, *"Accuser, do you know
My servant Job? He's upright, he won't break.
You've pounded him to mush and misery
But still he cleaves to his integrity."*



The Second Wave

from JOB 2 : 4 - 10

Ablaze with rage, Satan's voice turned shrill. "*Skin
For skin!*" said he. "*Your servant Job stands firm*

So long as he's unscathed, but watch him sin -

He'll curse your name. Just let me make him squirm!"

God answered, "*Have your way but spare his life.*"

Ecstatic lunacy! The Blighter struck

Job's body head-to-toe with sores. Job's wife

Harangued, "Curse God and die! What rotten luck!"

"You speak as foolish women speak," Job said.

"Shall we accept God's goodness but reject

Adversity? I won't recoil in dread

For God's grace comes in ways we don't expect."

Job trembled, pondering how he should react ...

What had he done? And why was he attacked?



Comforters

from JOB 2 : 11 - 13

Good friends show kindness. Job was blessed with three:
A Temanite, a Shuhite, a Naamathite.

They hastened to convey their empathy
But even at a distance, they took fright!

They didn't recognize him, ashen-faced,
Despoiled. They clamored loudly, wept and wailed
And moaned to see Job's frame cut down, erased!

Forlorn, the men sat down, their aim derailed.
For seven days and nights, Job's friends sat by
Though no one spoke. They'd raised their voices in
Lament, they'd wept for him, pitched dust to sky
For him! ... *Had Job been judged for secret sin?*

Uneasy silence ... each man grew perplexed –
God targeted the good man. *Who'd be next?*



Gloom Closes In

from JOB 3 : 1 - 12

At last, Job spoke. He cursed his day of birth.
He cursed the night on which he'd been conceived.
He cursed his mother's fecund place, her mirth
Should rather have been sorrow, he believed.
*"If only she'd been barren! May the night
Of my conception be expunged! Let gloom
Obscure the day, the year!"* Job said. *"Invite
The thick, black darkness to subvert her womb!
Diviners who prognosticate this day
Should curse it! Rouse a dragon to eclipse
The sun! Sweep all the twilight stars away
So day won't break ... this awful day Dawn skips.
One stillborn boy, no breath to lift my chest
But cloistered in the deep, my soul would rest."*



Give Me Death!

from JOB 3 : 13 - 26

With angst and sighs replacing daily food,
Job languished, having lost all *joie de vivre*.
His only path for restful quietude
Profaned the basic tenets of yeshiva.
*“I would have lain down quietly, to sleep
Alongside kings whose kingdoms disappeared,
And princes banking gold they could not keep
And slaves and prisoners thinking they’d be feared.
The wicked cease from raging there, the great
And small are all alike,”* said Job. *“Why not
Exult to have the grave? Interment crate
Acknowledges man’s destiny to rot.”*
Indifferent to the hope within God’s hedge,
Job judged the tomb more fit than Heaven’s pledge.



Eliphaz Offers Comfort

from JOB 4

“Perhaps you’ll hear me,” Eliphaz said, “I
Must have a say. Your strength set things aright
For those with feeble knees. You stood close by
Your friends in need, brought humor and delight.
How now for you, my friend, to be dismayed?
Should not your fear of God be confidence
Enough for hope? Or has distress betrayed
Your false regard for Wisdom’s providence?
Calamity has fallen, yes. But who
Claims innocence? The putrid crops we sow
Are harvested in kind. We get what’s due.
Yet God stands true, He’s just, He does not owe.
Your house of clay, degraded to the bone,
Must hold against the blast these winds have blown.”



Born For Trouble

from JOB 5

The Temanite continued: *“You should know
Vexation slays the foolish, anger kills.*

*If you expect your answers here below,
Begin a tally of all human ills.*

*Affliction never comes from dust, it’s not
A crop that sprouts in soil. The common cup
Flows full with liquid from a moldered pot:*

*Man’s born for trouble as the sparks fly up!
... But happy is the man whom God reproves!*

Do not despise His discipline, my friend.”

Then Eliphaz reminded Job: *“God moves
Through pain and sorrow to a better end.*

*Accept misfortune. Stand firm and endure
With patience. Afterwards, you’ll stand secure.”*



Is Affliction Contagious?

from JOB 6

“*Were comfort your intent, you’ve missed the mark!*

While God refuses to retract His hand,”

Job said, “your words, my fellow patriarch,

Reveal you fear contagion in our land:

Will raw affliction spread from me to thee?

My heartsick soul craves gladness, but your gift

Offends! Weigh anguish! Weigh calamity!

Make note which pan provides the greater lift.

Like water from the wadi musters heat

For mist, your words belch fetid gas! Have I

Reached forth my hand to beg? Is there deceit?

Please tell me where I’ve erred and what’s my lie!

If there’s injustice on my tongue, impeach –

But God will judge the merit of my speech.”



Job Seeks Answers

from JOB 7

“Im forced to labor here, a slave who pants
For shade, a hired man waiting for his wage.
If I,” said Job, “should deign to look askance
At life’s undoing, why not rant and rage?
I’m weary! Days allotted me have gone
More swiftly than a weaver’s shuttle, while
Disaster stalks my footsteps and her spawn
Entraps me as I strive for every mile.
I won’t restrain my trenchant tongue! I’ll speak
Because my life’s a breath, a dying cloud.
Should God avert His gaze, my outcome’s bleak
But answers now might reconcile this shroud.
The One who watches men must tell me why
He chose to target me ... I’ll hear and die.”



Bildad Accuses

from JOB 8

Another friend of Job's made bold to speak.
"Your words," said Bildad, "*blow like desert wind.*
Bravado! Did the Lord arouse your pique
When He rebuked your sons because they sinned?
His judgment of transgressions must be right
Or else you'd have return of your estate.
Seek counsel from the past. Ancestral light
Proves evildoers crumble from their weight.
Don't trust the spider's web or weave your roots
Into the rocks. Your God will not reject
Integrity, but those who lack it, He refutes.
Do good and earn the laughter you expect.
Let those who censure you wear rags of shame
If - as you now contend - you're not to blame."



Can Man Find Peace?

from JOB 9

“Our fathers asked what we ask: Can a man
Be right with God, have peace in knowing Him?”

Job wondered. “He moves mountains, by His plan

The heavens spread apart and oceans trim.

He orders constellations, numbers stars,

Yet I would never see if He passed by.

No human effort obviates my scars

But needing mercy, I tap His supply.

If I could summon Him, attempt to steal

His power, He’s far stronger, without peer.

And justice? To His judgment, all men kneel.

He’s not a man encamped in temporal sphere.

No umpire will adjudicate my cause

As I’m the one – not Him – with fatal flaws.”



This Loathsome Life

from JOB 10

“I loathe my life! I’ll vent my bitter soul
To Him whose hands created me from clay
But turns me now to dust! He knit the whole
Of me ... to rip my flesh and tear away.
Destruction’s what He wants? Then why create
Me? – Answer, if you will and don’t pretend
He’s not in charge! Capricious hand of fate
Could knock me down, its blow would not offend!
I should have been as though I had not been,
Delivered to the tomb! Lord, quit from me
That I may have a little cheer and then
I’ll go. In utter darkness, I’ll be free.”

Maintaining he was guiltless in God’s sight,
Job thought his friends were mean and impolite.



Zophar Urges Repentance

from JOB 11

“Permit me,” Zophar said, “to interject.

This multitude of words will not acquit

You! Professing innocence, your disrespect

Discloses deeper guilt than you’ll admit.

Can you discover God? Look high or low

Yet He alone decides what He’ll reveal.

If He should speak right now, perhaps He’d show

The depth of wickedness your claims conceal.

Put off iniquity and get your heart

Right, Sir! In witless self-conceit you’ve bared

The hollow man within. You think you’re smart

But be advised – you’re doomed. You won’t be spared.

Forget your peak performances now past.

Repent! ... Or else you’ll surely breathe your last.”



Job Responds

from JOB 12 : 1 - 12

Job answered Zophar: *“Wisdom dies with you!*
Sage wizards of the obvious, have I

(While hardly wise like you) denied what’s true?

You’d be less sanguine were your lives awry.

Am I inferior to you? I’m not!

I called on God, He hasn’t yet replied.

But ask the beasts and birds – each one begot

By Him. The Earth instructs, fish at sea provide

Their declaration to affirm God’s hand

Gives every living thing its life and breath!

As taste buds test food, the ears test words and

Your callow counsel yields to shibboleth.

Is wisdom not the sphere of older men?

May I live long enough to reach your ken.”



Wisdom Comes From God

from JOB 12 : 13 - 25

“T rue wisdom comes from Him. All power, might
Are His,” said Job. “From Him, we understand
He gave us life and strength to live upright.

His reach extends beyond the world we’ve scanned.

What He tears down will never be rebuilt,

When He shuts in a man, there’s no release.

He holds the universe, He sets the tilt

Of planets, His endeavors never cease.

By His firm hand, the waters are restrained

... Or loosed to inundate a thirsty ground.

He brings to pass whatever He’s ordained.

What He obliterates will not be found.

You fuddle wisdom like the drunken man

Who can’t distinguish armchair from divan.”



I Need Silence!

from JOB 13 : 1 - 12

“No! *I’m not inferior to you!”* Job
Said again. *“Give me silence here today!
I’ll speak to God – while you pretend to probe
On His behalf. Don’t tell me what He’d say!
Will it go well when He examines you?
(He will one day.) Your worn-out platitudes
Won’t furnish deft defense. Deceit will do
No good – your lies will fail as truth obtrudes.
Because you fear Him, you’ll be terrified
By His reproof. His radiance will shake
You to your core and even when you hide
He watches, noting every move you make.
Your pompous proverbs scatter with the wind
But words unleashed are pointless to rescind.”*



I Will Trust

from JOB 13 : 13 - 28

“*B*e silent so that I may speak to Him!
I must approach Him! Yes, despite my chains!
I'll argue, though my prospects may be dim
And if He slays me, scatter my remains.
A godless man could never be this bold –
To face the living God and state his case.
But I've no fear, my veins will not run cold
For I'm convinced God looks through eyes of grace.
I'll ask two things if He will let me speak:
I need to know His hand's on me. I need
To know my sins. I won't deny I'm weak.
When He seems far away, my hopes recede.
My body's like a threadbare garment, frayed
At every seam, a rotten thing, decayed.”



Life Is Fleeting

from JOB 14 : 1 - 6

“Man’s destined for annoyance, pain and strife –
A flower that blooms to wither,” Job observed.

“A shadow on the wall, his fleeting life

Dissolves to memory, fading unpreserved.

Lord, why aim arrows of displeasure at

A man? He’s pitiful, dangling between

His term of birth and death ... plebeian gnat.

But You know how to scrub the unclean clean.

Man’s torment journeys with him to the crypt

And God determines each day in the glass.

He sets the changeless limits of the script

And He alone decides when man will pass.

Divert Your gaze, my Lord, and let me rest

Before I’m done ... my trifling last request.”



Consider The Tree

from JOB 14 : 7 - 12

“There’s more hope for a tree than for a man!
He’s helpless thrusting roots into the Earth
To stand against the wind. His arms don’t span
As branches do. His trunk retains no worth.
Yes, trees have better odds! Though cut to ground,
Awakened roots transform the faintest scent
Of moisture into life! But man stays bound
By finite days ... he sleeps when all are spent.
What’s left,” Job questioned, “when his days expire?
As water turns to vapor on the sea
And rivers disappear when parched and drier,
Man slumbers, fades away ... But not the tree.
Until the heavens are no more, the deep
Encloses man. He won’t be roused from sleep.”



Hide Me Now

from JOB 14 : 13 - 22

“Will You conceal me, Lord? ... Let wrath subside!
Before you measure out my days, permit
Asylum. Let the dark of Sheol hide
Me. Summon me the moment You acquit.
When a man dies, will he have life again?
Will he be changed?” asked Job. “Remember me.
I long to hear the sound of your amen
Confirming my ascent to liberty.
You monitor my steps, but sin is sealed.
Man’s hope departs as noble mountains crumble.
Fierce torrents wash Earth’s dust from stony field
And infirm firmament resumes its rumble.
The man who mourns for self will never know
Which sons earned honor, which ones stockpiled woe.”



Eliphaz Condemns Job

from JOB 15

Then Eliphaz of Teman answered back:
*“If you were wise, your useless talk would cease!
Instead, your lips deliver daft attack
Against the One who dictates your release.
Were you the first man ever born? Before
The hills, did you and God make secret plans?
Our gentle counsel – guidance you ignore –
Pours from the gray-haired wisdom of our clans.
Are consolations from our God too small
For you? Perhaps His terrors will persuade
You to adopt a different view. This brawl
With God will leave you broken and dismayed.
Enough with arrogance and youthful pride!
Be cautious crossing Him whom you’ve defied!”*



Job Begs To Be Heard

from JOB 16

“What sorry comforters you are! Is there
No limit to your haughty words? No end,”
Job asked, “to condescension? My despair
Craves consolation from one steadfast friend!
Where once I was at ease, He crushed me, seized
And shook me by the neck. His arrows split
My kidneys, gall spilled out, but He was pleased
To war on me, harass me to submit.
Don’t let the Earth become my resting place
Too soon. But stand on my behalf! Adjure
One Witness in the dock to plead my case!
My prayers, divine Antagonist, are pure:
Give grace for final years of my sojourn
Because the path I walk has no return.”



Who Should Judge?

from JOB 17

“My days dispatch. My spirit’s broken down.
The grave awaits these bones, yet mockers jeer
And make my name synonymous with ‘clown.’
They gawk at me from egoistic sphere.
Lay down Your pledge, secure it, don’t begrudge
My apprehension in the midst of pain.”
Job fumed, “I’m he at whom men spit! They judge
Through vacant eyes, usurping Your domain.
... But Time recedes, my plans are torn apart.
Because I look to Sheol for retreat,
Its shield will hide me. Let destruction start
And set the pit to yawp and worms to eat ...
What good is Hope? Corruption’s token must
Decamp with me when I’m ground into dust.”



Bildad Rails

from JOB 18

“How long will you indulge defiance, Job?
If you'd seek understanding, we could talk
But you regard your friends as beasts! The globe
Won't be upended just because you squawk!
Consider,” Bildad warned, “you've set the snare
And now with feet entangled, every stride
Sets tighter knots. You trudge on unaware
Each twist ensures the snags can't be untied.
Disease and death will purge what's left of you:
Your habitation plundered – branch and roots,
Your name and widespread fame sequestered to
Oblivion before your sin pollutes!
The evil man who knows no fear of God
Will see his substance pounded into sod.”



My Redeemer Lives

from JOB 19

“Ten times you have insulted me! Nay, more!
But if the err is mine, why prove disgrace
To me? As if I hadn't known before?
Must I forbear your chutzpah to my face?
You've wronged me,” Job accused, “but fiercer wrong
Is God's. He closed the net, walled up my way,
Stripped honor and the crown. Though I belong
Among the living, each breath reeks decay.
If I could have my tale transcribed, engraved
Upon a rock, its message written there
Would still affirm – though flesh could not be saved –
My resolute assurance to declare:
Through joy or pain, no matter what He gives,
I know for certain my Redeemer lives!”



Zophar Renders Judgment

from JOB 20

“Reproof and insults, is it?” Zophar seethed.

“The godless man should comprehend his lot:

He rises high ... then reaps what he’s bequeathed

And proofs for his existence are forgot.

He mocks the deadly cobra at his feet

While slurping venom with a shriveled tongue.

This serpent deals destruction so complete

There’s nothing left behind but noxious dung.

Should anyone dispute the link that ties

Your suffering to your sin, herein is Guilt:

You’ve crushed the poor by propagating lies

And seizing houses which you never built.

Let darkness claim those treasures you reserve

As God inflicts the judgment you deserve!”



Why Do The Wicked Prosper?

from JOB 21

Job answered, “Listen! Give heed as I speak!
Console yourselves in knowing you may mock

When I’ve said all. But look at me! I’m weak!

You see me and attempt to hide your shock.

Impatient, am I? Yes! The wicked man

Establishes himself and prospers well.

He spurns the fear of God to work his plan ...

From Sheol, he bids God to go to Hell!”

Job raised his gnarly finger, “Still, you say

God stores a man’s transgressions for his sons?

Why would he care? The wrath he ought repay

Rains not on him but on the guiltless ones!

The wicked have no fear of judge or jury

Or summons from far-distant day of fury.”



Eliphaz Answers Job

from JOB 22

When Eliphaz replied, he asked, “*What use
Are you to God? Or to yourself? You’ve shown
Vast wickedness, ingrained, beyond excuse,
Iniquity you’re careful to disown.
You stripped a brother naked for his pledge.
The weary suffer thirst because of you,
The hungry want for bread, while you allege
An innocence of heart that can’t be true!
You’ll find no cover for your sin, no hole
In which to crawl and clouds won’t hide you. God
Sees all and weighs the evil in your soul –
He knows the path where wicked men have trod.
It matters not how badly you’ve behaved:
Return to the Almighty and be saved!*”



A Distant God

from JOB 23

“His hand weighs heavily on me. I’m prone
To bitterness,” said Job, “and if I knew
Where I might find Him, I’d approach His throne
To argue facts ... compel an interview.
I’d build my case, an ironclad defense
With words well-chosen, warranting reply.
He’d listen and agree my claims make sense –
Good conduct needs no other alibi.
Yet when I look before me, He’s not there,
I look behind ... again, without success.
If He stands to my left, I’m not aware
And when He’s on my right, I’d never guess!
I yearn for Him. By His commands I’m fed
With words more precious than my daily bread.”



Make Evildoers Pay!

from JOB 24

Resuming his acerbic rant, Job said,
“Man’s sin runs rampant! Where’s his Judgment Day?
Appoint an hour that evildoers dread ...
Apportion due reward to make them pay.
The poor man’s labor harvesting the field
Reaps wheat – but not for him. He goes without.
He gathers grapes from vineyards but the yield
Wets other lips, while he knows naught but drought.
If folly has its recompense, then why
Does God permit such evil to persist?
Men cling to false security and die –
The memory of their strivings soon dismissed.
If I’m a liar, let my words convict ...
Provide one instance where I contradict.”



Bildad Bellows

from JOB 25

“Pugnacious man! Presume to challenge God?

Then why should we attempt to intercede?

Let Him address you, chasten with His rod

As He has done! His ways do not mislead!

Dominion,” Bildad said, “belongs to Him.

He rules the heavens, multiplies the peace

On high, unnumbered troops obey His whim.

His light shines down on all without decrease.

Shall man be justified or pure before

The Holy One? Can we be clean though born

Of flesh and blood? Foul vermin! We deplore

Our abject state and rightly earn His scorn!

Man seeks prestige yet fails to understand

The Moon derives its grandeur secondhand.”



The Heavens Above

from JOB 26

Exhausted, Job replied, “Grand words to lift
The weak! Profound advice to soothe the soul!
Sheer eloquence! You have a subtle gift
For noting wonders no man can control.
When deep seas shut their dead away, God peers
More deeply. He hangs Earth in empty space
With void above, below. He stretches spheres
Beyond our view. He veils the full moon’s face.
He binds up waters in thick clouds, contains
Them for His use. When heaven’s pillars shake
At His command, the clouds burst forth with rains.
He overwhelms with flood and deadly quake.
His thunderous tumult crashes and dismays
... Exposing wonders, heaven-scent bouquets.”



Holding Fast to God

from JOB 27

“The God I serve,” Job said, “you know – the One
Who took away my right and crushed my frame –
He’s God! No matter what He’s said or done
To me, I won’t revile, I won’t defame
His goodness. With dying breath, I’ll rehearse
My innocence and never let it go.
One truth sustains me throughout life’s traverse:
God’s power exceeds our puny quest to know.
The wicked man devises complex plans
Providing for descendants who remain.
His goods and wealth become another man’s
Reward, his noble purposes in vain.
When tempests terrorize him in the night,
The east wind sweeps him into reckless flight.”



Where Is Wisdom?

from JOB 28

“Man searches underground for precious stones.
He culls the dirt,” Job said, “for silver, gold
Dust, sapphires – cached within unguarded zones
Beyond the margins bird and beast behold.
With hand to flint, man overturns the base
Of mountains, bringing rarest gems to light.
... But where is Wisdom found? Is there a place
To dredge for Wisdom buried in quartzite?
More valuable than lapis lazuli,
More costly than the gold in Ophir mines,
God settled Wisdom’s measure, how and why,
Declared exquisite worth by His designs.
To man He said, ‘True Wisdom is to fear
The Lord, to turn from evil and draw near.’”



Paean to the Past

from JOB 29

Job heaved a wistful sigh and said, “*I thirst
For former days when God watched over me!
His friendship blessed my house and we conversed
As mates. His lamp gave light for all to see.
Those days, I rescued souls who had nowhere
To go. They called to me, I heard their voice.
The orphan with no mentor sought my care.
When widows cried, I urged them to rejoice.
I clothed myself with justice and became
A father to the needy, eyes and feet
To guide the blind. I helped support the lame.
I saw, as chief, their needs were mine to meet.
I smiled on them, though they could scarce believe
My hands delivered comfort and reprieve.”*



Taunts from Bullies

from JOB 30

“No matter,” Job said. *“Now they mock my name.
These younger men of low regard abuse
My current state, conspiring to inflame
Me. They live in holes but crawl out to accuse.
Because He loosed His bow to humble me,
They’re unrestrained. They taunt me without cause.
They chase my honor as the wind. But He
Won’t rescue me from pain ... He will not pause.
When I cry out, He’s silent. If I stand,
He turns away. When I expected good,
Then evil came, though more than once, my hand
Stretched out to help what stricken souls I could.
My skin turns black, my bones are burned from heat
And mourning hums the song of my defeat.”*



Appeal to Innocence

from JOB 31

“*If I’ve behaved with falsehood or deceit,”*

Job said, “God’s wrath should fall on me. His scales

Weigh true. If I’ve purloined my neighbor’s wheat

Or wife, God justly adds to my travails.

If I’ve mistreated widows, strangers, poor

Unclothed or needy souls, if I’ve despised

Dejected orphans knocking on my door,

Cut off my arm for I should be chastised!

If I’ve put confidence in gold, or set

My heart to idolize the moon and sun,

A punishment more loathsome than regret

Should be my lot. Such things I’ve never done.

The facts are plain. Let hearers understand:

If I’ve been false, may stinkweed plague my land.”



Elihu Steps Up

from JOB 32

Job's friends fell silent, unsure what to do.
Although they'd taken time to itemize
His sins, Job wouldn't budge! So Elihu
Spoke up. *"I'm young and won't pretend I'm wise
For wisdom follows years. Yet God still gives
Discernment independent from one's age.
You've challenged Job, declared imperatives,
But talk is insufficient to assuage.
My anger burns within! You've raised my pique
By failing to delineate his crime.
Your silence grants me liberty to speak
The truth. I don't intend to waste your time.
If I should stoop to flattery today,
My Maker's sure to carry me away."*



Men of Clay

from JOB 33

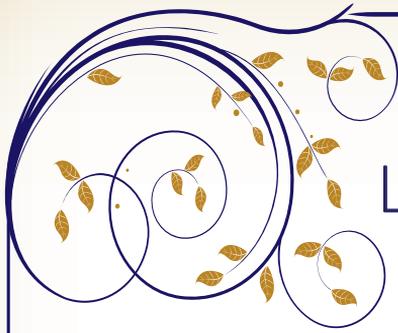
To Job, Elihu said, *“Please hear my speech
For I’m a man like you, formed out of clay.
I’ve heard the claims of innocence you preach –
Contending you’re mistreated, cast away.
You’ve catalogued offenses, dirty deeds
To prosecute the Maker for His plan,
But He’s the Sovereign, His rank supersedes
Yours. Would you school Him, play the wiser man?
Or would you scold our God, presuming He’s
Obliged to give account? He opens eyes
For visions, He brings proud men to their knees
Through pain and He delivers them from lies.
I’ve spoken truth but if you disagree,
Speak up. Defend yourself. Enlighten me.”*



Examine Facts

from JOB 34

Elihu went on. “Listen, now!” he said.
“You’ve quibbled but you can’t resolve this feud.
Now examine facts, weigh what’s true, instead
Of validating Job’s tale as construed.
Does God seek our advice to rule the Earth?
Does He commission evil? Show disgust?
If He removed Himself to far-flung berth,
Mankind would perish, fading into dust!
God models like regard for rich and poor,
He watches and sees every step they take.
But Job presumes God ought to love him more
For bearing harsh affliction and heartache.
Let Job be judged! He dares to dictate terms
For sin’s discharge ... he’ll soon be food for worms.”



Look At the Heavens

from JOB 35

“*You think you're virtuous, more just than God.
You claim it makes no difference if you've sinned.
You cloak yourself with holy-man façade ...
Demanding profit when you're disciplined.”*

*Elihu went on, “You see those clouds? Behold
The heavens high above! Do you believe
Almighty God takes notice of your gold?
What tokens from your hand does He receive?
He fills the night with music to surpass
All other songs. He hears our cries of woe.
He spreads out all Creation as a class
To teach what neither bird nor beast could know.
It's nonsense, Job! Each self-indulgent word
Humiliates and makes you sound absurd.”*



The Mighty God

from JOB 36

“Bear with me, I will speak on God’s behalf.”

Elihu said, “Though God is mighty, He
Abhors no man but leads them with His staff,
Assists the righteous in adversity,
And teaches those who listen and obey.

He showers them with peace, augments their worth.
When men refuse to hear His voice, their day
Ends grimly once they perish from the Earth.

He woos you from the jaws of your distress
To feed you, Job ... bring fullness to your bones.
Instead, your head hangs down while you obsess
About injustice, voicing gripes and moans.

Once you concede your argument is flawed,
You’ll comprehend the greatness of our God.”



Wisdom's Counsel

from JOB 37

“My heart leaps and trembles from its place! Hear
The wondrous thund'rous rumble of His voice?
He looses lightning, loads Earth's atmosphere
With rain clouds, snow, then scatters them by choice.
Whatever He commands, the Earth will do ...
Through discipline or grace or lavish love,
He orchestrates His wonders. Job, could you
Blow cooling winds, spread out the skies above?
Perhaps you'll teach us – darkness veils our eyes.
Instruct us in the pitfalls to avoid,”
Mocked Elihu. “You deftly minimize
Rebellion, thinking you won't be destroyed.
But God displays His awesome majesty
To wise men who draw near on bended knee.”



From the Whirlwind

from JOB 38 : 1 - 11

Enveloped by the wind, Jehovah broke
His silence. “Who are you to counsel me?
By words devoid of knowledge, you provoke
This fray, Job. Gird your loins defensively!
Give evidence what role you played when I
Determined Earth’s foundation, set its piers
And laid the cornerstone! Did you supply
Creation’s hymns or frame angelic cheers?
When I stretched out the lines, declared the floors
Of firmament, you watched Me, I presume?
Did your hand sculpt the coastlines? Open doors
For disgorged waters bursting from the womb?
If we’d been partners when I clothed the cloud
And wrapped the dark, you might be justly proud.”



Darkness and Light

from JOB 38 : 12 - 24

The Lord continued: *“Have you governed Day
Or caused emerging Dawn to know its place?
When Earth shakes off her darkness, does she pray
Your countenance illuminates the space?
Have you explored the springs that form the sea
Or walked along recesses of the deep?
The gates of death – are they observed by thee?
Explain your sense of Earth’s expansive sweep.
Confide in me where light and midnight dwell –
Have you discerned their paths to home? Give heed
To my reserves of snow and hail, then tell
Me if I’ve gathered all the stock I’ll need.
You know these things, for you’ve so many years
... And wisdom far exceeding earthly peers.”*



Rain and Skies

from JOB 38 : 25 - 41

At breakneck speed, God queried Job: “Who cleaves
The channel for torrential rains? Or guides
A thunderbolt? Whose surging flood relieves
The parched terrain? Does your seed spawn the tides?
Can you bind Pleiades? Loose Orion’s
Belt? Marshal constellations? Tame She-Bear
And her cubs? You’re sure celestial scions
Love your laws? Do planets look to you for care?
Job, lift your voice. Instruct the clouds to spill
Their stores. Bid lightning follow where you say.
Can you conform this world to suit your will?
Or count the clouds? Or hunt a lion’s prey?
When hatchlings chirp their wish for daily food,
Whose nourishment sustains each raven’s brood?”



Goat, Ass and Oryx

from JOB 39 : 1 - 12

Relentless in His inquiry, the Lord
Went on: *“Do you know when the mountain goats
Give birth? Have you observed the doe’s reward
At labor’s end? (You watched and scribbled notes?)
Who let the untamed ass roam free ... or gave
Him wilderness and salt plains to explore?
He scorns domestic asses doomed to slave
For rowdy masters he’s free to ignore.
Will Oryx serve you, dwell with you by night,
Then drive your plow by day? Can you set ties
Securely, steer his harrow straight and tight?
– Or will the bull assert his massive size?
If you suppose these beasts will gather grain,
Don’t be surprised when friends express disdain.”*



Horse and Birds

from JOB 39 : 13 - 30

When He went on, did God suppress a laugh?

“Consider this, my friend: the ostrich flaps

Her wings but never flies. Is this my gaffe?

Should I have reconfigured her ... perhaps?

The war-like charger – did you bestow his might?

Adorn his neck with splendid mane?

He’s fearless – anxious to engage the fight.

When trumpets sound, he craves untrammelled rein.

Does your sagacity propel the hawk

To soar, to spread its wings and venture south?

Do eagles seek your counsel? When they squawk,

Does wise instruction issue from your mouth?

On distant peaks, the eagle spies its prey

Without a thought to what you do or say.”



Across the Bar

from JOB 40 : 1 - 14

“Would you, Faultfinder, haul Me into court?

You challenge God. Produce your evidence!

Instruct Me!” said the Lord. “Do facts support

Your charges? Justify your impudence!”

A chastened Job replied, “If I dare speak,

My words condemn me. I’m without excuse.

Because I uttered frivolous critique,

I’ve locked my lips against repeat abuse.”

Once more, within the whirlwind God addressed

His servant Job. “Though you withdraw complaint,

There’s still one allegation I protest:

That I’m the sinner, you’re the super saint.

So vent some holy wrath! Pound sin to sand

As proof salvation rests in your right hand.”



Behemoth

from JOB 40 : 15 - 24

“Observe Behemoth,” said the Lord, “A brute
Of massive strength and size, yet he eats grass.
I made him, groomed him, planned each attribute:
His thighs of steel, his bones as strong as brass.
In every sinew tightly knit, he stores
Majestic power, but near his hulking feet
Small creatures play. If hungry lion roars,
The timid beasts dash off in swift retreat.
Not him. He’s prime among the works of God,
A fearless ward, obedient to Me.
He lounges in the reeds and marshy sod
Concealed by branches of the willow tree.
When rivers overflow and storm clouds burst,
Their waters slake Behemoth’s boundless thirst.”



Leviathan

from JOB 41 : 1 - 10

“Can you reel in Leviathan? The sea’s
Most awesome breed,” God said, “will not be caught
With iron claw. He’s not designed to please ...
To follow orders as one thinks he ought.
Do you suppose you’d cage him like a bird
Or tether like a plaything in your yard?
Will merchants divvy up his parts? Absurd!
He’s apt to sniff man’s traps. (It isn’t hard.)
You can’t slash through his skin with your harpoons
Nor pierce his head and hoist him on a hook.
Such flights of fancy, authored by buffoons,
Might be successful ... in a storybook.
The man who prods Leviathan should see
All power lies with One and I Am He.”



Beast Among All Beasts

from JOB 41 : 11 - 34

“*Who has given first to Me that I should
Now repay? Oceans deep and heavens high
Belong to Me!”* declared the Lord. *“Who could
Pierce Leviathan’s hide? His teeth defy
Approach, acute eyes spark like rays of dawn.
His snorts spew blazing light, his nostrils smoke,
And flames shoot out from every breath he’s drawn.
His neck’s as strong as firmly-planted oak.
To him, a bludgeon’s just a piece of straw.
He laughs when feeble men take up the lance.
His jagged underbelly – like a saw –
Tears up the ground beneath his wide expanse.
But fearless Beast among all beasts, he brings
Unbridled fealty to his King of Kings.”*



Job Repents

from JOB 42 : 1 - 6

Deploring his hauteur, Job heaved a sigh.
He said, "I'm certain You do all things well
Without my input or incessant why.
You're not accountable to clientele.
You sketched Yourself in gentle juxtapose
To make the point - I've earned Your ridicule."
Job blushed with shame. "In ignorance I chose
To elevate myself, I played the fool.
No more, my Lord, I need Your presence now.
I covet your instruction ... tutor me
To comprehend Your voice. I disavow
Myself with dust-and-ash humility.
My ears had heard of You, but then today,
I saw You! May I never look away!"



The Cost of Careless Speech

from JOB 42 : 7 - 9

The Lord had more to say: “You, Eliphaz,
Should know I’m furious with you and your
Misguided cohorts. My servant Job has
Spoken truth. You’ve gushed verbal horse manure!
My righteous wrath necessitates repairs:
Bring seven bulls and seven rams. Request
My servant Job to pray for you. His prayers
Will discharge every falsehood you’ve expressed.
Inform the Shuhite and the Naamathite
They, too, must answer for irreverent speech.
My faithful servant Job will make things right,
And you’ll find My forgiveness in your reach.”
Job’s friends obeyed, determined to console
... Because Job prayed, God granted them parole.



Restoration

from JOB 42 : 10 - 17

The Lord restored Job's fortunes, lavished him
With double portions, wealth and dividends.
Thankful God had spared him, life and limb,
He prayed each day for God to bless his friends.
His family grew to seven sons and three
Fair daughters – Jemimah, Keziah and
Keren-Happuch – whose lovely symmetry
Surpassed all other beauties close at hand.
Job lived another hundred forty years
Deriving pleasure from his family's growth.
His legacy (uncommon for Job's peers)
Endowed like shares to sons and daughters both.
In history's annals, God and man collide ...
But Job retained God's favor. Then he died.



Coda

Job lived and died ... with that, the drama ends –
A hackneyed happy-ever-after tale?
The classic title character contends
With life's misfortunes, hardship and travail.
An ordinary man – or fiction's feint?
The book *declares* its record bona-fide:
He lived, this man, and registered complaint
For grievances too cruel to be denied.
But *ordinary*? Who's so bold, so brash
To query God? Job pressed his cheeky case ...
When others might predict a lightning flash
For taunting the Almighty to His face.
Assured a holy God is always fair,
The man named Job engaged in fearless prayer.



The Patient Man

Credentials of the scrivener are unknown
But universal truths from Job are sound.
Job resonates – *his* story is our own.
We glean therein what lessons may be found.
What answers lie behind man's suffering?
What good? If pain is man's persistent lot
And God permits the Devil's plundering,
A sane man ought to howl! Why would he not?
Job's comforters proposed his torment came
Because of sin, a widespread point of view.
But Job refused to howl and earned a name
Synonymous with *patience* – tested, true.
The fruits of perseverance multiplied
When Job decided to relinquish pride.



An Afterthought

But wait! No hint of subsequent debate
In Heaven's realm? No proper *told-ya-so's*
Or jollity? A fearsome *tête-à-tête*
Perhaps, to tweak the Devil's crooked nose?
As Job's tale ends with life and health restored,
The biblical account neglects to tell
The next encounter hosted by the Lord
With unrepentant canker straight from Hell.
The veil between Eternity and Time
Drew back for this extraordinary glance
Into the unfamiliar Paradigm
Where angels sing and worship God with dance.
Job's agony foreshadowed history's Cross
Secured by blood to seal the Liar's loss.



Dear Job:

So Job ... your saga bridges centuries
Of weak-kneed sympathizers quelling grief.
Today's supply of woes and infamies
Originate from similar motif.
The question *still* begs: Who dispenses wrath?
Does God - as unctuous despot - stoke our fear?
Is He a sadist tempter on our path?
Could such a *monster* coax man to draw near?
... But you drew comfort from the great *I AM*,
Creator of all things, the *El-Shaddai*.
An upright man, you yielded like a lamb,
Your wounds so onerous you begged to die.
Thanks, Job. You proved life's pangs may be unjust,
But comfort came from One you learned to trust.

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