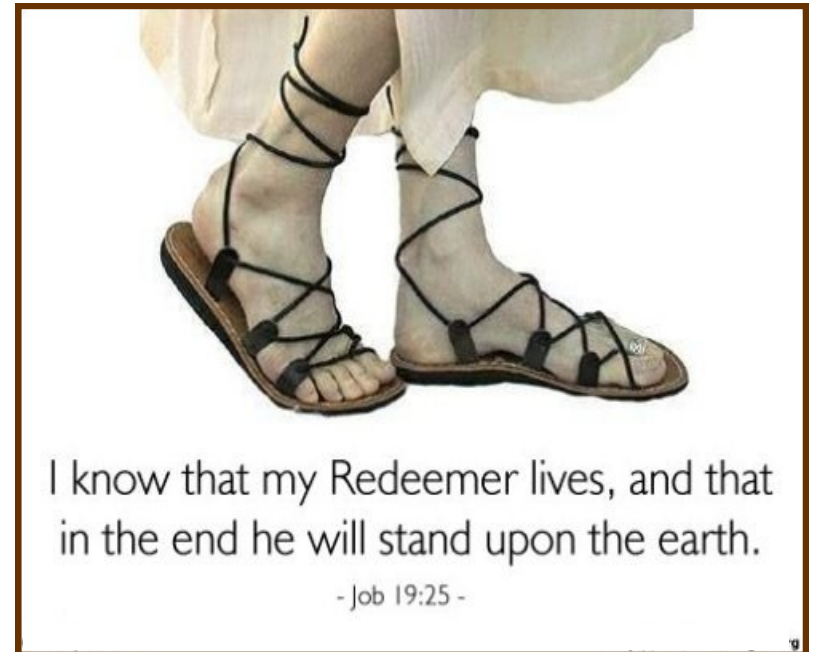


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Job

Chapter Thirty Seven:



Hymn to Yahweh

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 THIRTY SEVEN: HYMN TO YAHWEH

The First Lesson: The Wisdom of the Almighty

In c.36: 32 He hides the light in his hands and he orders the light to return again. In c. 33 He announces it to his friend that it is his possession and he can ascend to it.

Verses in c.37 begin as follows: 1 About this my heart trembled and leapt out of its place. 2 He will listen to the report in the terror of his voice and the sound which proceeds from his mouth. 3 Above all the heavens he examines, and his light surpasses the limits of the earth. 4 After him, the sound will roar, he will roar in the voice of his greatness and one will not investigate when he has heard his voice. 5 God will thunder in his voice wonderfully, and he does great and unsearchable things, 6 he who commands the snow to fall on the earth and the winter rains and the showers of his strength. 7 He has put signs on the hand of every man that they might know his works. 8 The beast will enter its lair and remain in its cave. 9 From the lower part, storms will arise and the cold wind comes from the Arctic. 10 By the breath of God, the ice increases; and very broad waters flow. 11 The clouds desire the grain and clouds pour out their light. 12 The clouds circle over everything, wherever the will of the governor leads them, to every place he commands them on the face of the land, 13 on one tribe, or in their own land, or in whatever place of his mercy he orders them to be found.

We should consider from the arguments put forth by Eliud that he agreed partly with Job and partly with the friends. He agreed with Job (c. 7 and 14:11) because he believed the reward of good men and the punishment of evil men will be in the future afterlife. (32:22) But he agreed with the friends of Job (33:27) because he believed that all the adversities of the present life happen in return for sins, and if one repents of his sins he will return to prosperity. He also agreed with the friends of Job as to the person of Job himself, (36:18) because he thought that he had been punished for his sin, and that the justice which appeared in him at first was a pretense. He interpreted the words of Job wrongly (33:10) as did the others. As to the prosperity of evildoers in this world, he alone touches on this cause: that they prosper because of the sins of others. (34:30) In the same way he alone also seems to clearly touch on the angels as the mediators between God and man. (33:23)

Job did not answer his arguments, first, because he agreed with him in his principal dogmas in which the friends, whom he had called, "cultivators of false dogmas" were in error (13:10) What Eliud said about his person was not of such great concern to Job that he wanted to argue with Eliud because of it especially because he could not prove the purity of his conscience with any better arguments than he had already used, namely, by divine witness. Second, [Job did not answer] because from youthful presumption, in the manner of quarrelsome people, words which he had not said or which he had meant in a different way than Eliud had interpreted them. Therefore, to avoid quarrelling, he determined that he should rather be silent and commit the question to divine judgment.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 37

But to preclude one from believing that the knowledge of divine truth must be withdrawn from man forever he says, "But now," in the present time, "they (men) do not see the light," which is the clarity of divine knowledge. Yet he proclaims to the friend of God that, "he can ascend to this light" at some time as he already said. (36:33) He introduces a comparison for this, "The air will be suddenly compressed into clouds," because of the grouping together of water vapors from the South, and because of this the air is darkened. But darkness of this kind passes away after a little while when the clouds have been broken up, and so he says, "and the wind, when it passes," i.e., the north wind, "will chase the clouds away." By this he means: In this way, although now he is enveloped in the darkness, yet when death comes, it will put this darkness to flight like the changing of the wind.

Sometimes shiny objects are discovered in dark places. The Northern region is called dark because of its distance from the sun, and yet much gold is discovered in Northern regions which is one of the most glittering metals. This is caused by heat withdrawing deep into the inner bowels of the earth, because of the chill of the all-encompassing air, it works more efficaciously there to produce gold,, and so he says, "Gold will be produced by the wind," as if to say: Gold is more plentiful in the part of the earth blown by the North wind. Just as in the darkness of the Northern region one finds the brilliance of gold, so also in the darkness of the ignorance of this life one finds some of the brightness of divine knowledge, though darkly, and so he says, "and fearful praise from God." For if nothing of divine clarity shone in us, we could in no way praise him. Even more, if the divine truth shone clearly to us as the noon day sun, we would praise him carelessly. But since something of the divine light shines in our knowledge with some darkness, we praise him with dread, as a man does something with dread which he knows he cannot do perfectly. So he says, "We cannot find him worthily," so as to come to know him as he is through our own investigation. This is because of his excellence, and so he says, "he is great in might," for his power infinitely exceeds all his effects, and so he cannot be fittingly found through them. He answers the objection that God uses only violence because of the greatness of his power in governing man saying "and with right judgment," for he is great, because, "His judgments are incomprehensible." (Rom. 11:33) Nor is this due to a lack of justice, but to the excellence of his justice. and so he says, he is great in "justice". Because of his greatness we can neither sufficiently conceive him with our mind nor sufficiently praise him with our mouth, and so he says, "and he cannot be explained," fittingly by man. This is the reason why his praise is dreadful, and so he then says, "Therefore men", no matter how powerful they are, "will fear him" because of the greatness of his power, "and they will not dare to contemplate him," i.e., presume to know him fully, "all those who seem to themselves to be wise." He says this clearly because the wisdom of a man, however great it may seem to himself or to others, is as nothing compared to divine wisdom.

Eliud had spoken above (36:27-30) about the changes in the atmosphere: drought and rain, as a result of the covering of the clouds from which God produces lightning from his light. Now he treats in an extended manner about the light itself, which is sometimes hidden by the clouds and is sometimes seen, and the thunder which arises from the clouds. He begins with the light saying, "He hides the light in his hands," for as an effect of his power he sometimes hides the light of the sun and the stars by clouds. But since this obscuring is not permanent, but only temporary, he adds, "and he orders the light to return again," when the clouds go away. Or these words can refer to the darkening and illumination of the air by the rising and setting of the sun. One must remember that sensible things are a kind of sign of intelligible things, and so we come to the knowledge of intelligibles through sensible effects. Among all the sensible effects the most spiritual is light. So light leads more efficiently to knowledge of intelligibles, inasmuch as sight, whose experience of knowing is perfected by light aids intellectual knowledge most. Since, then, that sensible light is hidden from men and communicated to them by the power of God, Job gives us to understand by this that in him there is a more excellent kind of light, i.e. a spiritual light, which God reserves as a reward for men for virtue. So he says, "He announces it," the light which is metaphorically represented by physical light, "to his friend," the virtuous man, whom God loves, "that it is his possession," that this spiritual light is a treasure which God reserves for his friends as a reward, "and he can ascend to it," when he merits it by the works of virtue and prepares himself to possess it. However, one can also explain this about corporeal light. For the Platonists posited that the souls of men were derived from the souls of the stars. Therefore, when human souls guard their dignity by living according to reason, they return to the clarity of the stars from which they descended, and so one reads in the *Dream of Scipio* that "rectors and guardians" of cities, "set out from here," i.e., from heaven, "and return here." In this he gives us to understand that he does not put the ultimate reward of virtue in temporal goods, but in spiritual goods after this life. Now this is the most wonderful thing that earthly and corruptible man is advanced to the possession of spiritual and heavenly things, and so he says, "About this," that man can ascend to possess the light, "my heart trembled," from the fear of wonder and astonishment, "and leapt out of its place," so that it not only desires and eagerly strives after these things according to a sensible life, but also is transported to spiritual and heavenly things.

After sight which is the knowledge of corporeal light, comes hearing which especially serves the intellect because by it one perceives the voices which express intellectual conceptions. Moreover, just as by the vision of corporeal light man is led to the knowledge and expectation of some higher light, so also by the hearing of corporeal sounds, formed by divine power, man is led by the hand to hear the spiritual doctrine of God, and so he says, "He (man) will hear," from God, "the report," of spiritual doctrine, "in the terrible sound of his voice," in the image of thunder, which is like the terrible voice of God. He explains this report saying, "and the sound which proceeds from his mouth," for the sound of physical thunder seems formed by his hand, that is, his power; but the sound proceeding from his mouth is the teaching of his wisdom, according to Sirach, "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High." (24:5)

To preclude the error that God does not have another light higher than the corporeal light of heaven, he says, "Above all the heavens he examines," as if he should say: His vision is not below heaven but above it. Moreover, one can only see something in some light, because, "everything which is clear is light." (Eph. 5:13) So the light of God must necessarily be more excellent than the corporeal light which is first found in the heavens, and so he says, "and his light," the intelligible light, "surpasses the limits of the earth," for it is superior to every corporeal creature. Just as the material light of heaven is below him, so also the sound of material thunder is beneath him, and so he says, "After him," that is, under him, "the sound will roar," of material thunder. Moreover, he has another spiritual voice, the teaching of wisdom, which is incomprehensible to man. He speaks about this when he says, "he will roar in the voice of his greatness," the voice which teaches his greatness, and not all hear this voice as they hear the sound of corporeal thunder. Those who in some way do hear his voice cannot comprehend it, and so he says, "and one will not investigate," perfectly, "when he has heard" i.e. known spiritually by some man, "his voice," the teaching of wisdom.

Since the power of the heavenly bodies operates in all these kinds of effects, he therefore proceeds next to the heavenly bodies, and so he says, "Have you perhaps made the heavens with him?" In this metaphor he expresses the causality of God over the heavenly bodies. For just as an artisan is the cause of his work, so God is the cause of the heavenly bodies, yet in two different ways. For an artisan produces an artifact from a preexisting matter; but the celestial bodies cannot be produced from preexisting matter, but in their production the matter came to be at the same time as their form. To distinguish the higher heavens from the heavens which are called the atmosphere he adds, "which are most solid like bronze after fusion." Remember that there are certain bodies among us which yield under pressure and can be penetrated like air and water and things of this sort. Some, however, do not yield to pressure nor can they be pierced, like stones and metals. So to show that the higher heavens are not divisible or permeable like air and water, he compares them especially to bronze, among other metals, because men used it most frequently in technology.

Lest Job perhaps should presumptuously say that he knew the works of God perfectly, he continues mockingly, "Show us what we should say to him," as if to say: If you are so wise that you know all the works of God and you can argue with him on this subject, teach us so that we can answer him. He shows they need this when he says, "We who to be sure are enveloped in darkness," as if to say: We need you very much to show us what you said before because we are completely ignorant of them. Since he had spoken many times about the divine effects, lest this be imputed to him from presumption as though he thought that he knew perfectly these things, he disclaims this saying, "Who will tell him what I am saying?" as if he says: No one can sufficiently tell these things which I said to you about his effects. It befits him alone because of the excellence of his power. If anyone raises himself up to such presumption that he thinks he speaks about God sufficiently, danger would threaten him by that very fact, and so he says, "Even if a man speak," as though willing to understand the divine effects, "he will be devoured," as if swallowed up by the greatness of the matter about which he speaks, as Proverbs says, "He who investigates majesty will be crushed by glory." (Prov. 25:27) This can also be interpreted in another way. Not only is man not fittingly able to list the divine effects, but, "even if he (God himself) speaks," to them by revealing them to man, "man would be devoured," unable to understand such a great thing, and so we read in John, "I have many things to say to you which you are not able to bear now," (16:12) and in Deuteronomy, "What is flesh that it should hear the voice of the living God." (5:26)

The Second Lesson: Eliud Completes his Praise of God

14 For listen, Job, stand and consider the wonderful things of God. 15 Do you know when God commanded the rains and they show the light of his clouds? 16 Do you know the paths of the clouds, the great and perfect science? 17 Are not your garments hot when the Southern wind has blown on the earth? 18 Have you perhaps made the heavens with him, which are solid like bronze after fusion? 19 Show us what we should say to him, we who to be sure are enveloped in darkness. 20 Who will tell him what I am saying? Even if he speaks, he will be devoured. 21 But now they do not see the light. The air will be suddenly compressed into clouds and the wind when it passes will chase the clouds away. 22 Gold will be produced by the North wind and the fearful praise from God. 23 We cannot find him worthily, and he is great in might, judgment, and justice, he cannot be explained. 24 Therefore, men will fear him and they will not dare to contemplate him, all those who seem themselves to be wise.

After Eliud told the many marvels of divine works he now attacks Job who seemed to accuse God of injustice when he could not yet understand his works, and so he says, "For listen, Job," to what I am saying about the grandeur of divine works. "Stand" in rectitude of mind, "and consider," by your own self, "the wonderful things of God," which are shown in his works. Among those wonderful things he begins with the rains. Men perceive them sensibly, but science still cannot understand their first origin by which God brought them into being and so he says, "Do you know when God commanded the rains," which falls upon the earth by divine decree? After it has fallen, the air, which was first dark from the density of the clouds becomes bright by rarefaction. So he says, "and they," i.e. the falling rains, "show the light of his clouds?" which means the light of the sun shining through the clouds which vanish and which the dense clouds hide. He speaks about their motion saying, "Do you know the paths of the clouds?" namely, how and from what cause they are propelled to various regions by the breath of the winds? The knowledge of clouds is the source of knowing all atmospheric changes- for example, winds, rain, snow, hail, thunder, and other like thing; and so he says, "great and perfect science?" They are great because the phenomena are formed on the higher body, perfect because the knowledge of the clouds includes all knowledge of these phenomena previously cited and the effects which follow from them in these lower bodies. Since the clouds are driven by the winds, he consequently adds the effect produced by the wind saying, "Are not your garments hot when the South wind blows on the earth?" For the South wind, makes the air warm because it comes from warm regions. From this heat, the garments of a man can make him hotter. Thus he clearly mentions the action of the South wind because when it comes from below the equator and gathers water vapors together it condenses them into clouds and moves them. But the North wind, which comes from above more disperses the clouds.

But the voice is not only ordered to the teaching of men who hear it, but also to the perfection of natural works which happen following the command of divine wisdom. Therefore, he repeats a second time, "God will thunder in his voice," in the command of his wisdom, "wonderfully," by producing wonderful effects, and to express this he then says, "and he does great," according to their nature, "and unsearchable things," by human reason. He begins to list them and says, "he who commands the snow," by the voice of his wisdom, "to fall on the earth," because the snows are formed by his command, as are the rains and showers, and so he says, "and to winter rains," which abound in winter, "and the showers of his strength," which are formed by some more violent cause and with the impulse of the wind. Since everything which happens in lower things is somehow or other ordered to man, he says, "he has put signs on the hand of every man that they might each know his works." For different dispositions of the air correspond to the different works of men. One is the work of the night, another the work of the day, and man does one work in time of good weather and another in rainy weather. Man discerns what work corresponds to each time, according to the divine gift of reason. This is the sign that God has placed in his hand, in his operative power of all men to do works so that they may know how to fittingly distribute their tasks according to the diversity of times. That providence extends even to brute animals, who do different things according to different times by natural instinct, and so he says, "The beast will enter its lair," in rainy weather, "and will remain in its cave," for a fitting time.

Then he shows the effects of the different winds. On this subject one must consider that the South winds produce the rains and storms. North winds cause cold air. Southern winds come to us from the direction of the South Pole, which is unknown to us, because it is sunk down beneath our horizon by the same distance as the North Pole is elevated above our horizon, and so he says, "From the lower part, storms will arise," as if to say: A storm comes to us by a wind which proceeds from the part of heaven which is always extended down under our horizon, and this wind is called the South Wind. As to the North Wind he says, "and the cold wind comes from the Arctic." For "Arktos" in Greek means the Northern Hemisphere, from which the name "Arcturus" comes for the constellation of Ursus, which is always elevated above the horizon. The northern wind comes from this direction and causes cold because the sun is farther from that part of heaven. He attributes this to divine wisdom saying "By the breath of God, ice increases," as if to say: When he causes the wind by blowing, the north wind, which causes the icy chill, arises. "And again," from the breath of God which causes the south wind "very broad," that is, very abundant, "waters flow." These are the rains which are caused by the south wind.

He relates these effects to the usefulness for men saying, "The clouds desire grain," as if to say: The clouds are ordered to grain as an end for which they are useful. Each thing desires its own proper end, and accordingly he says the clouds desire grain, because clouds are certainly useful for grain. Or, the reason the rains descend from a cloud and water the earth is to make it fertile for the production of grain. Or it is also useful for clouds to cover grain and shade it sometimes so that the grain does not dry out from the unremitting heat of the sun. He adds another useful feature of the clouds when he says, "and the clouds pour out their light," which can refer either to the light of lightning flashing according to what he already said in the preceding chapter, "If he wills to extend the clouds or to make flash with his light." (36:29) Or this can more refer to the light which shines in the air from the sun's rays reflected off the clouds and mixed with them in some way. So the brightness of the sun appears in the air before the rising of the sun and also after its setting because of the reflection of the rays of the sun from the clouds which are in a higher place, which the solar rays reach more quickly and leave more slowly.

After he has discussed the usefulness of the clouds he describes their movement saying, "The clouds circle over everything." For the clouds do not stop above only one part of the earth from which the vapor has risen, but by the force of the winds they are carried to different parts of the earth. The winds generally follow the motion of the sun like some great circle and so East winds blow in the morning, then the southerlies come, and finally towards the evening, westerly winds. So the clouds move in a circle as a consequence of this. To show that this proceeds from divine providence he says, "Wherever the will of the governor (God) leads them," since the clouds do not always reach every part of the heavens, but sometimes this one and sometimes that one as God disposes them. The clouds cause a variety of effects, for example, rains, snow, hail, thunder, and the like. Just as the movement of the clouds over the earth depends on divine disposition, so also the effects caused by the clouds depend on this disposition and so he says, "to any place where he commands them on the face of the land," as if he said: The effect the clouds produce on the earth depends on divine precept. Since he had above said, "wherever the will of the governor leads them," (v.12) he explains this saying, "on one tribe," because clouds sometimes appear in one region and not in another, as Amos says, "I have rained on one city and do not on another." (4:7) This happens in two ways, because sometimes clouds appear in the same region where the vapors are generated. This happens when from the power of the wind the vapors are not moved to remote places. As to this he says, "or in their own land," i.e., the land of the clouds where they were formed. Sometimes they are moved to another region, and as to this he says, "or in whatever place of his mercy he orders them to be found." For God provides clouds and rain to a region at the right time, and especially to hot climes when rain is rare from his great mercy.