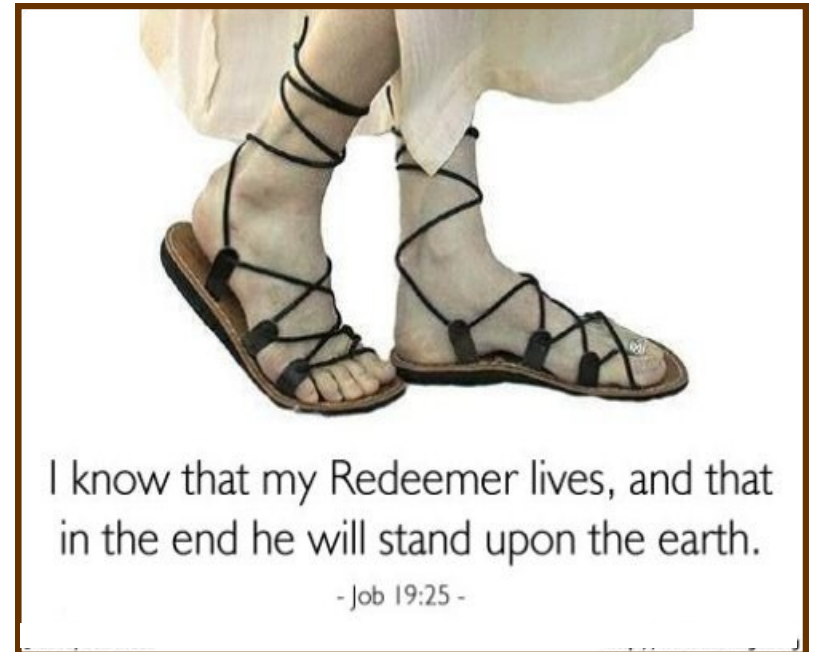


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Job

Chapter Nine:



The Problem of Evil

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 NINE: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL (THE FIRST APPROACH)

The First Lesson: God is Almighty

1 Job spoke next. He said: 2 Truly I know this is so and man is not be justified compared to God. 3 If anyone will wish to argue with him, he will not be able to answer him one question for a thousand. 4 He is wise in heart and Almighty in power. What man has resisted him and found peace? 5 He has moved the mountains and they were ignorant whom he has destroyed by his anger. 6 He moves the earth from its place and its pillars will be shaken. 7 He commands the sun and it does not rise and he conceals the stars as though under seal.

Blessed Job in his answer above in which he had responded to Eliphaz's words, seemed to have overlooked one argument which Eliphaz had proposed about the justice of God when he said, "Will man ever be justified in comparison with God?" (4:17) He rather seemed to have spoken almost contentiously with God when he said, "Am I the Sea or a whale, etc." (7:12) and "How long will you not spare me, etc." (7:19) So Bildad of Shuah replied to the argument of Blessed Job taking his starting point from a defense of divine justice and said, "Can God deceive judgement?" (8:37) and he ended his speech in the same vein saying, "God does not spurn the simple man, etc." (8:20) So Blessed Job shows in this next response first that he does not want to speak against divine justice, nor does he want to argue against God, as they suspected. This is what the text then says continuing, "Job spoke next. "Truly I know this is so," namely that "God does not deceive judgment" and that "he does not spurn the simple man." These were the propositions of Bildad. "And" I also know," man is not be justified compared with God." In this response he answers what Eliphaz had said, "Will a man ever be justified in comparison with God?"

He consequently shows a sign of how he knows this. When a man is just in comparison to another man, he can freely and securely argue with him, because justice and truth are made clear in mutual discussion. However, no man is secure when he argues with God. So he adds, "If anyone will wish to argue with him," i.e. man with God, "he will not be able to answer him "one question for a thousand."

Since, as has been said, he intends to investigate why the innocent are punished in the world, he shows in conclusion what could impede him from this investigation and with what intention he wishes to make this investigation. He could be impeded from this investigation by two things. First, by the affliction from which he was suffering. For men whose minds are occupied with sorrow are not able to investigate accurately. He refers to this saying, "May he withdraw his rod from me." Second, from the reverence which he had for God. For men sometimes omit to investigate things which pertain to God from the reverence which they have for him. As to this he says, "Let terror of him not frighten me." He means: May he grant my spirit rest from the affliction which I suffer and not impute irreverence to me because I debate about divine things. Therefore, I will be able to investigate and so he continues, "I will speak and not be afraid of him," i.e. not being frightened by him. "Nor can I answer when I am afraid of him," i.e. when I hold myself back from investigating something because of reverence for him. Note that the fear of God sometimes does not restrain those fearing God from investigating divine things. This is the case when one investigates divine matters from a desire to know the truth, not to comprehend the incomprehensible, but always with the rudder that one submits one's intelligence to the truth of divine things. However, they are restrained by the fear of God lest they seek to investigate divine things, willing to comprehend them and not regulating their intellect with divine truth. So, by these words, Job intends to show that with this rudder he is investigating things which pertain to divine providence so that he may subject his intellect to divine truth, and not oppose divine truth which would be against the reverence for the fear of God.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 9

He shows next why no matter how pure he is he cannot defend himself for being convicted as impure by God because of two things in which God excels man. These are the purity of his justice and the authority of his majesty. As to the first, he says, "For he is not a man like myself that I should answer him," as if to say: If any man wants to convict me of impurity, I would be able to resist him, if he should charge me with things he thinks cannot be preserved in man concerning the perfect purity of justice. But I cannot respond in this way to God for there is no defect found in him. As to the second he says, "and he cannot gain a hearing with him as an equal."

For when two men contend with each other, they can have a judge who examines both arguments. But there can be no arbiter between God and man for two reasons. One reason is because a judge must have a higher wisdom which is like the standard according to which the arguments of both parties are examined. It is clear, however, that divine wisdom is the first standard according to which the truth of all things is examined. Because of this he then says, "Nor is there anyone who can evaluate both our arguments."

He means here: There is no one superior to God from whose greater wisdom divine wisdom can be corrected. Another reason is because there must be a greater power in the judge by which he can sanction both parties. Job excludes this quality saying: "Who could lay hands on both of us," i.e. coerce both for this is excluded by the immensity of divine power, which he has already demonstrated. (vv. 4-7)

Truly we should note that the greatest number which has a proper name is in our usage a thousand, for all the higher numbers are named as multiples of the lower numbers, for example, ten thousand, one hundred thousand. This happens reasonably, for according to the ancients, the species of numbers extend up to ten and beyond this one repeats the first numbers again (1,2,3,) and this fact is clear according to the names, whatever the truth of the matter. For the cube of ten is one thousand for one thousand is ten times ten times ten. Thus Job chooses the number one thousand as the highest of the numbers which designates for us every large determined quantity. When he says that man cannot respond to God, "one question for a thousand," it is the same as if he were to say: no determined measure of number can express how much divine justice exceeds human justice, since the latter is finite but the former is infinite.

He shows as a consequence that man cannot approach God in any proportion in arguing a case when he says, "He (God) is wise in heart and Almighty in power." For there are two types of dispute. There is one in which the dispute is carried on by argument and this is done by wisdom. There is another when the dispute is carried on by force and this depends on power. In both of these, God exceeds man, because in both his strength and wisdom he exceeds all strength and wisdom. Consequently he shows both of these pre-eminences. First he shows the preeminence of God in power which he certainly begins to show in relation to men when he says, "what man has resisted him and found peace?" as if to say: "No one." Note that man obtains peace in one way from someone who is more powerful and in another way from one who is less powerful or his equal in power. For clearly the more powerful acquires peace from the less powerful by fighting against him, as when a powerful king wages war against a rebellious subject in his kingdom and after he obtains victory, re-establishes the peace of his kingdom. In the same way, a man also sometimes obtains peace from someone who is his equal in power by fighting him. For although he cannot overcome him, he can still wear him out by his persistence in the fight and lead him to sue for peace. But one never obtains peace from someone who is more powerful by resisting and fighting him, but by submitting himself to him humbly. Thus, an evident sign that the strength of God exceeds all human strength is the fact that no one can have peace with him by resisting him, but only by obeying him humbly. As Isaiah says, "You will maintain us in peace. Peace surely which comes because we trust in you." (26:3) However, the wicked who resist God cannot have peace, as Isaiah says, "For the wicked, the Lord says there is no peace." (57:21) He means this here when he says, "What man has resisted him and found peace?"

Then he shows that the power of God exceeds all the power of natural things as much in higher as in lower bodies. He shows this in the lower bodies from the fact that he moves those things which seem especially firm and stable among lower things by his will. So among the mixed bodies, to which he alludes after man, the mountains seem to be the especially firm and stable to which the stability of the saints is compared in the Scriptures according to Psalm 124, "They who trust in the Lord are like Mount Sion." (v.1) Yet the Lord moves the mountains by his power, and he speaks about this saying, "He has moved the mountains." Even though he can certainly do this miraculously by divine power, since this seems a promise made to those with firm faith in Matthew, "If you have faith and do not hesitate, if you will say to this mountain: Rise and cast yourself into the sea, it will be done," (21:21) and in 1 Cor., "If I have all faith to move mountains," (13:2), yet the text seems to more fittingly refer to the natural course of things. For the order of nature demands that everything generated naturally, is also corrupted at a determined time. So since the generation of mountains is natural, it must be that the mountains would naturally be destroyed at some time. He calls this natural corruption of the mountains a moving because the dissolution happens from some moving of their parts. Nor does he attribute these things which happen naturally to divine power against reason. Since nature acts for a given end, everything which is ordered to a certain end either directs itself to the end or is ordered to the end by some other being directing it. Therefore, a natural thing, which does not have knowledge of its end so as to direct itself to it, must be ordered to the end by some higher intelligence. The whole activity of nature then is compared to the intellect directing natural things to the end, which we call God, like the motion of the arrow is fittingly compared to the archer. Therefore, as the motion of the arrow is fittingly attributed to the archer, so the whole activity of nature is fittingly attributed to divine power. So if the mountains are corrupted by the activity of nature, it is clear that the stability of the mountain is overcome by divine power. Now sometimes it happens among men that a king conquers a strong city by his own power, and the more quickly and imperceptibly it happens, the more the king shows his power. The fact then that the mountains are moved especially attests to the divine power since it happens almost immediately and imperceptibly so that even those who live in the mountains cannot forecast their fall and perish as a result of it. So he says, "They were ignorant whom he has destroyed by his anger," as if to say: God does such great things so suddenly that even those who live in the mountains cannot foresee them. This is evidently because if they knew beforehand, they would take precautions and not be destroyed. He adds, "by his anger" to show that God sometimes regulates natural operations according to the order of his providence as a necessary means to punish the sins of man. He is metaphorically said to be angry with them because he is said to take revenge on them, which is the usual result of anger among men.

But since man's purity however great it can be is found wanting under divine scrutiny, he shows as a consequence that when he says that he is pure and innocent, he understands himself to be pure and innocent as a man, not as though he were lacking in nothing from the standpoint of the righteousness of divine justice. Know that there are two kinds of purity: one is of innocent man, the other is of the repentant man. Both of these are imperfect in man if he is compared to the perfect righteousness of the divine standard. He speaks about the purity of the repentant saying, "If I were washed," if I will be zealous to cleanse myself from my sins, "as with the waters of snow," which are said to be very cleansing.

He speaks about the purity of the innocent when he says, "and my hands shine as though very clean," i.e. if in my works, which are designated by the term hands, no uncleanness would be found, but the bright clarity of justice would shine from them. However, he uses the expression, "as though very clean," to suggest that perfect cleansing cannot exist in man. He says, I will be cleansed, "yet you will dip me in filth," because I will be shown to be filthy compared to your justice and convicted by your wisdom. For there is always some defect found in human works. Sometimes this results from ignorance because of the weakness of the intellect, but sometimes from negligence because of the weakness of the flesh; sometimes from the infection of some affection for earthly things even mingled with good works because of the mutability of the human heart which does not persevere fixed always in the same state. So there is always something in human works which is deficient from the purity of divine justice. When someone is unclean, who nevertheless has shown some exterior manifestation of justice, the signs of justice which appear in him exteriorly do not suit him. So he then says, "and so my clothing will deprecate me," for exterior works are designated as garments because they wrap someone round about as Matthew says, "They will come to you in sheep's clothing." (7:15) Clothes then deprecate someone when the exterior works of a man who pretends to be just are not in accord with his interior desires.

Because his adversaries thought he was presumptuous as in these words he had implied that he was just and innocent, he begins to confer with God about his innocence for God alone can judge the conscience. So he continues, "If I say," in my heart, "I will speak so to no avail," claiming that I am just and innocent, "I alter my countenance entirely," from the assurance which I began to feel about my innocence to the anxiety in searching for my sins, "and I writhe with pain," reflecting in examining my conscience, that perhaps I will not be punished for some sin. He then expresses the cause of his pain saying, "I was anxious about everything I did."

For the cause of pain is great for someone when he has great anxiety about some one thing and yet he falls in the very thing he tries to avoid. However, he experiences great anxiety about everything he does fearing lest he will fall away from justice in some way. This is what he means when he says, "anxious about everything I did."

The reason why he was so anxious about everything he did was fear of the severity of the divine judgment. So he says next, "knowing that you do not spare anyone who is delinquent," unless he be converted because as Psalm 7 says, "Unless you will be converted, he will brandish his sword." (v.13) "If however," after such great zeal for innocence, "I am so wicked," that I merit to be punished with such great punishments from by God, "why have I labored in vain?" i.e. with such great anxiety to maintain my innocence? For he labors in vain who tends to an end by his labor which he does not attain.

He passes from the mixed bodies to the elements. Among these the earth seems to be the most fixed and stable which as it is the center of all motion is unmoved. Yet sometimes, it moves naturally because of gas which is contained within it in some of its parts as the philosophers correctly taught. This is the theme he addresses when he continues, "He can move the earth from its place," not completely as a whole, but he agitates parts of it like in an earthquake. In this movement, even the mountains which are like the pillars based on the earth are struck violently and so he continues, "and its pillars will be shaken." By pillars can be understood literally columns and other kinds of structures which seem to cling to the earth which are shaken about in an earthquake. Or one can understand by pillars the lower, deep, hidden parts of the earth because just as the foundation of a building is set up firmly on pillars, so the stability of the earth proceeds from its center, to which all the parts of the earth naturally tend. Consequently, all the lower parts of the earth are the supports for the upper regions of the earth and are like pillars. So, since an earthquake proceeds from the deep regions of the earth, it seems to be like a violent shaking of the pillars of the earth.

Finally, he proceeds to the heavenly bodies, which also result from divine power. Consider that as the nature of the earth is to be unmoved and at rest, so the nature of the heavens is constant motion. Just as then the power of the earth can be overcome clearly by divine power through the motion which appears in it, so the power of a heavenly body is shown to be overcome clearly by divine power the fact that the motion is impeded of the rising and the setting of the sun and the other stars. So he continues, "He commands the sun and it does not rise." This certainly does not mean that the sun is in fact impeded from rising, since the motion of the sun is continuous. But the sun sometimes appears to human perception not to rise, for example, when the air is so cloudy that the rising sun does not appear to the Inhabitants of the earth with its usual brightness. Since cloudiness of this kind happens by the action of nature, it is fittingly attributed to the divine command, which regulates the action of the whole of nature as has been said. (9:5) It is clearly apparent that the statement that the sun does not rise should be understood to mean that the rising sun is hidden from the next verse, "and he conceals the stars as under a seal." For the stars almost seem to be concealed when the sky is so covered with clouds that the stars cannot be seen.

The Second Lesson: God is Infinitely Wise

8 He alone takes the measure of the heavens and treads upon the waves of the Sea. 9 He made Arcturus, Orion, the Pleiades and the deep constellations of the South. 10 He makes great, unfathomable, marvelous things which cannot be numbered.

After Blessed Job has shown the firm character of divine power, he here begins to show the depth of divine wisdom. However, he proceeds in an inverse order to the preceding one. Before he began by showing the divine power in human affairs and proceeded to the heavenly bodies, whereas here he begins with the heavenly bodies and proceeds to human affairs. He does this reasonably, for the wisdom of a maker is shown in the fact that he makes things which endure and so to show the wisdom of God, he begins from the creature which are more stable, namely those manifesting divine wisdom more clearly. The power of someone's strength is shown by the fact that he can change things from their condition and so men are usually tested in lifting and hurling stones, by the size of the men they can pin to the ground and things of this sort. On that account, since he was demonstrating the force of the power of God, he began from those things in which this change appears more clearly.

Three things are required for someone aiming at an end. The first is that they fix their heart in nothing else which might delay them from the end, but hasten to attain the end. So he gives as his first example a runner who aims at the end of his course so that he does not tarry along the way. So he says, "My days pass swifter than a runner." In this he shows both the frailty of the present fortune and his intention to pursue something else. "They have fled away," as if repose for the heart is not found in the things of this world. The text then continues, "they have not seen the good," namely, to which my intention was born which is the true good. Therefore, I do not count myself rewarded for justice, because if you (the friends) think the present prosperity is a reward, I have been punished, as an innocent man, because this has been taken away. Second, when one pursues some end, he must acquire for himself those means which are capable of attaining the end, just as one who desires to be healed must acquire medicines by which he can be cured. In the same way, he who wishes to reach the true good, must seek those virtues by which he can acquire that end. So he then says, "They move on like ships laden with fruit." Two things are demonstrated in this verse: the frailty of present fortune, because ships laden with fruit hasten to sell it to keep the fruit from spoiling by delay, and the enthusiasm in tending to an end. This is as if to say: My days have not gone by empty, but I have collected virtues with which I am aiming at experiencing the end in effect. Third, remains the actual experiencing of the end and so he says, "Like an eagle swooping down on its prey," which he uses as an explanation for the first two things. For the eagle is a bird of swift flight and is especially fast when it is driven on by hunger and has the prey by which it renews its existence as a goal.

If it is unfitting that the punishments of the innocent please God in themselves and yet the innocent are frequently found to be punished on earth, another conclusion which is equally unfitting seems to follow, i.e. that punishments of that sort do not proceed from divine judgment, but from the malice of some evil ruler who has power over the earth and punishes the innocent. So he continues, "The earth is given into the hands of the wicked," as if to say: If the punishments of the innocent who are still punished on earth are not pleasing to God in themselves, it is necessary to conclude that God has committed the rule of the earth to some evil person, from whose iniquity, judgment is perverted on earth so that the innocent may be punished. He expresses this when he says, "He covers the face of his judges," i.e. he obscures their reason either with concupiscence, hate or love, so that they do not follow the truth of judgment in judging. "If it is not he," i.e. the wicked man to whom the earth has been committed who causes the punishment of the innocent, "then who is it?" i.e. who is the cause of the punishment. For supposing your position that sin alone is the cause of the present punishments, God cannot be the cause of this as he has already demonstrated. He expresses this when he says, "The earth is given into the hands of the wicked." This is certainly true in a sense inasmuch as materialistic men remain under the power of the devil, as one text says, "He who commits sin is the slave of sin." (John 8:34) However, it is strictly speaking (*simpliciter*) false. For the dominion of the earth is not absolutely given over to the devil, so that he can do what he likes freely on it. Whatever he is permitted to do proceeds from divine disposition which dispenses everything from a reasonable cause. So the very fact that the innocent are punished does not absolutely depend on the evil intention of the devil but also on the wisdom of God who permits it. Therefore, if sin is not the cause of the punishment of the innocent, it is insufficient to reduce it to the malice of the devil, but one must also find some reasonable explanation for God permitting it. So he clearly shows this saying, "If it is not he, then who is it?" as if to say: If the evil will of the devil is not the sufficient cause of the punishment of the innocent, one must investigate another cause.

To investigate the reason why the innocent are punished in this world, he first proposes the harm which he has experienced in the loss of his goods, and shows the fickleness of the present prosperity using a simile with those things which appear most fleeting in this world. Note first that different people have different relationships to the prosperity of this world. Some men have it as an end because they hope for nothing beyond this. This seems to be the opinion of those who declare that all rewards and punishments are in this life. Such men do not go beyond the prosperity of this world but the prosperity of this world escapes from them when they lose it. Some, however, among whom Job was included, do not place their end in the prosperity of this world, but aim at another end. They pass up the prosperity of this world more than they are passed up by it.

So, to show divine wisdom he begins with heavenly bodies, saying, "He alone takes the measure of the heavens." Note here that the wisdom of God seems especially praiseworthy in three things. First, of course, in the fact that he can measure something great with his understanding and wisdom. He takes up this theme saying, "He alone stretches out the heavens," for in the extension of the heaven is expressed their greatness of quantity. Thus God alone is said to have extended the heavens in as much as he alone could give the heavens such great quantity measured by his wisdom. Second, the wisdom of God appears praiseworthy in the fact that he reduces things which are variable and in uncertain flux to a certain order and makes them subject to his guidance. To show this point he says, "and treads upon the waves of the sea." For the waves of the sea seem to be the most disordered things in themselves, in as much as they are born about now here and now there by shifting winds, and yet God treads upon them inasmuch as he subjects them to his government. Third, the wisdom of God seems praiseworthy from the fact that God has established many things according to the reasonability of his wisdom, which appear marvelous to men whose nature they cannot investigate. These appear especially in the position and disposition of the stars, which nevertheless has been fixed wisely and reasonably by God. He enumerates these marvels beginning with the North Pole and proceeding to the South Pole. So he says, "He made Arcturus." Arcturus is a constellation in the heavens which is called *Ursa Maior* and has seven bright stars which never set for us but always circle the North Pole. Next comes, "Orion," for Orion is a very clear constellation in the sky because of its size and the bright clarity of its stars which are found in Taurus and Gemini. Next comes, "The Pleiades," which are stars existing on the breast of Taurus, as it is called, and which are also very clear to the naked eye. The text continues, "and the deep constellations of the South." Here we should note that to those who live on the equator, if indeed there are people there, both poles are visible, since their horizon divides the equator at right angles. Thus it is necessary that the horizon should transverse each pole at the equator. So both poles are visible to those living on the equator, as I have said. To those living north of the equator and going towards the North Pole, the North Pole is elevated above the horizon and the South Pole lies hidden in proportion to the distance they live from the equator. So to us who live in the Northern Hemisphere, the South Pole is never visible, and in the same way, the stars near it are hidden from us in direct proportion to the distance which we live from the equator. These are called the deep constellations of the South because they are hidden from us, as though hidden under the horizon.

The Fourth Lesson: The Cruel Lot of the Just and the Wicked

Lest someone should believe that divine wisdom has manifested itself only in the things just explained, he shows next that God made many other similar things which cannot be numbered by us saying, "He makes great things," in which the wisdom of God appears praiseworthy from the uniformity of their great size. This corresponds to the text already cited, "He alone stretches out the heavens." (v.8)

"Unfathomable things," because men cannot discover them as a result of their instability and yet they are still ordained by divine government. This corresponds to what he has already said, "and treads upon the waves of the sea." (v.8) "Marvelous things," whose natures men cannot consider although they are made according to reason by God. This corresponds to what he already said, "He made Arcturus," and so on. (v.9) The fact that he adds, "which cannot be numbered," must be referred to each attribute, so that men cannot count the divine actions, but God can count them who makes all things "according to number, weight, and measure." (Wisdom 11:21)

The Third Lesson: Job Cannot Struggle against God

11 Should he come near me, I will not see; if he withdraws, I will not know him. 12 If he suddenly interrogates someone, who will answer him? Who can say to him, 'Why are you doing this?' 13 He is God, whose anger no one can resist. Those who carry the earth bow down before him. 14 Am I great enough to answer him? And to address him in my own words? 15 Even if I were somewhat just, I will not answer him at all, but will rather ward off my judge by earnest prayer. 16 If I appeal to him and he hears my call, I do believe he will listen to my voice. 17 For in the storm he will wear me away and even multiply my wounds without cause. 18 He does not permit my spirit to rest, and he will fill me with bitterness. 19 If it be a question of strength, he is the strongest; if correctness of judgment, no one dares to bear witness on my behalf. 20 If I want to justify myself, my own mouth will condemn me. If I show myself innocent, he will prove me wicked. 21 Even if I am simple, my soul will not know this and I will be weary of life.

22 I have said one thing: He destroys the innocent and the wicked. 23 If he scourges, let him kill at the same time; and let him not laugh at the punishment of the innocent. 24 The earth is given into the hands of the wicked man, he covers the face of his judges. If it is not he, then who is it? 25 My days pass swifter than a runner; they have fled away and they have not seen the good. 26 They move on like ships laden with fruit; like the eagle swooping down on its prey. 27 If I say: I will speak so to no avail ; I will alter my countenance entirely and I writhe with pain. 28 I was anxious about everything I did knowing that you do not spare anyone who is delinquent. 29 If, however, I am so wicked, why have I labored in vain? 30 If I were washed as with the waters of snow, and my hands shine as though very clean, yet you will dip me in filth and my clothing will deprecate me. 32 For he is not a man like myself that I should answer him, and he cannot be heard in judgment with me as an equal. 33 Nor is there anyone who can evaluate both our arguments, who could lay hands on both of us. 34 May he withdraw his rod from me and let terror of him not frighten me! 35 I will speak and not be afraid of him; nor can I answer him when I am afraid of him.

After Blessed Job has shown that it is not his intention to argue with God, he proposes the principle issue in dispute between him and his adversaries. For Eliphaz had said that punishments from God are only sent for sins. Job had spoken against this in his first response. Since Baldath had tried to support the opinion of Eliphaz, Job repeats his opinion a second time saying, "I have said one thing: he destroys both the innocent and the wicked." By this he seems to mean: Death is inflicted by God not only on sinners, but also on the innocent, which is the greatest of the present punishments. So, what you say is not true, i.e. that man is only punished by God for his own sins. Deuteronomy teaches that death comes from God, "I give death and I will give life." (32:39) But although death is commonly inflicted by God on everyone, one thing which seems most severe is that the innocent experience many adversities in this life, besides the death which is common to all. He now intends to investigate the cause of this. So he then says, "If he scourges, let him kill at the same time," saying in effect: Granted that the scourge of death is common to all, still it seems reasonable that the innocent, who are not guilty of their own sins, should not be inflicted with any other punishment besides the death which is due to the original sin. For if, as you (the friends) say, there is no other reason why someone can be justly inflicted with punishment except sin, whereas clearly the innocent suffer punishment in this world, it seems to follow that they are punished without reason as though the punishments themselves pleased God. So he says, "and let him not laugh at the punishments of the innocent," for we ordinarily laugh about those things which please us in themselves.

Note that in the text, "If I appealed to him and he hears my call, etc." (v.16) he evidently has explained what he had said above in a more metaphorical way, "Should he come near me, I will not see." (v.11) For one should observe nearly always in the statements of Job that things said in metaphor are clarified in subsequent texts. What he had said above in brief and summary fashion, "Am I great enough to answer him," (v.14) he explains in the next text in a more extended way where he also assigns the reason why he does not answer but rather entreats his judge for mercy. Someone may answer a judge boldly for two reasons. First, if the judge is a weak one who cannot coerce the subject. He shows this is not the case here saying, "If it be a question of strength," i.e. in God to coerce his subjects, "he is the strongest," because he exceeds all strength. Second, someone boldly responds to a judge because he has confidence in his case. This happens sometimes because he has many witnesses to testify on his behalf. But he shows that this is also not the case here when he says, "if correctness of judgment," is required that someone is absolved by having many witnesses in his favor, "no one dares to bear witness on my behalf." In fact, the intellect of man does not conceive the justice of man could be greater than the truth of God which contradicts him.

Sometimes, however, although a man has no other witnesses to speak in his behalf, he is still confident in his case because he trusts in the testimony of his own conscience. Yet even the witness of conscience cannot prevail for men against the contrary accusation of God. He shows this in several degrees. The testimony of conscience has three levels, the highest of which is when one's conscience wants to render testimony that he is just, as Romans says, "The spirit himself renders testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God." (8:16) But this witness cannot stand fast against divine censure. He therefore says, "If I should want to justify myself," i.e. if I want to say that I am just, when God instead is objecting that I am unjust," my own mouth will condemn me," for it will render me worthy of condemnation for blasphemy. The second level is when someone, although he does not presume that he is just, still does not find fault with himself in his conscience for some sin, as 1 Cor. says, "My conscience convicts me of nothing." (4:4) But this witness cannot stand against God either, and so he says, "if I show myself innocent," i.e. if I want to show that I am without sin," he will prove me wicked," in that he will show sins of which I am not conscious to myself and others. For Psalm 18 says, "Who understands his crimes?" (v.13) The third degree is when someone, although he might be interiorly conscious of sin, still takes for granted either he had no evil intention or he did not do it from malice and deceit, but from ignorance and weakness. But this testimony also does not stand for man against God either. So he says, "If I am simple," without the deceit and duplicity of a depraved intention, "my soul will not know this." For man is unable to discern the fluid motion of his affection, both because of its variation and the mingling and impulse of many passions. Because of this, Jeremiah says, "The heart of man is wicked and inscrutable. Who will understand it?" (27:9) It is because of the ignorance of these sorts of things that man knows neither himself nor his state and life is rendered wearisome even to the just. So he says, "and I will be weary of life."

Because Blessed Job wished to affirm that he does not desire to argue with God, he showed the depth of the wisdom of God in natural things using many examples. Now, however, he wishes to show the profundity of the divine wisdom in human affairs. Note here that three things pertain to the governor of human affairs. The first is that he should dispense the precepts of justice and other benefits to those subject to him. The second is that he should examine the acts of his subjects and the third is that he should subject those whom he finds guilty to punishments. In these three things he shows the immense profundity of divine power. First, because he provides his benefits so deeply and with such finesse for his subjects that it cannot be grasped even by those who receive them. He addresses this theme when he continues, "Should he come near me, I will not see; if he withdraws, I will not know him." Note that in the Scriptures, God is said to come near to man when he bestows his benefits on him, either by illuminating his intelligence, exciting his love, or bestowing any kind of good on him. So Isaiah says, "Our God Himself will come and save us." (35:4) On the other hand, God is said to withdraw from man when he withdraws his gifts or his protection from him. Psalm 9 says, "Why, O Lord, do you stand afar off? Why do you despise me in opportunities in trial?" (v.22) Now it happens that God sometimes permits trials or even some spiritual defects to happen to some to obtain their salvation, as Romans says, "All things work together for the good of those who love God." (8:28) In this way God comes to man to obtain his salvation, and yet man does not see him because he cannot perceive his kindness. On the other contrary, God does not take away his manifest gifts from many men, and yet they turn them to their own destruction. So God is said to go away from man in the sense that man does not understand that he withdraws from him. Therefore the depth of the divine wisdom appears in the dispensation of his gifts.

Secondly, the depth of divine wisdom is shown in the examination of human acts, because he so acutely and efficaciously scrutinizes them that no one can escape his examination through any sort of craftiness. He says this next, "If he suddenly interrogates someone, who will answer him?" God interrogates man when he leads him to examine his conscience either by inspiring him interiorly or provoking him exteriorly with rewards and punishments. As Psalm 10 says, "God interrogates the just and the unjust." (v.6) But man would sufficiently answer God when nothing was found in him which could justly be censured by God. This happens to no man in this life, as Proverbs says, "Who can say: My heart is clean; I am pure from sin!" (20:9) He says clearly, "If he suddenly interrogates someone," because if a space of time is given to man to respond, he can wash his sins away by repentance. For at times it happens that someone is found remiss when he is examining the excesses of others and is afraid that his own excesses will be examined by others in the same way. But God does not fear this so that he becomes easy-going in the examination. For he has no superior who can judge his deeds, and so the question is added, "Who can say to him: Why are you doing this," to chastise him.

Third, the depth of the divine wisdom is shown in the punishment of the guilty, because no cunning tactics or power can avoid the vengeance of God wherever a man turns as Psalm 138 says, "Where can I flee from your spirit, or where can I hide from your face?" (v.7) He addresses this theme saying, "[He is] God, whose anger no one can resist." For anger, as attributed to God in the Scriptures, does not mean a movement of the soul but vengeance. Consequently, he proves this saying, "Those who carry the earth bow down before him." Those who carry the earth mean the celestial spirits, through whose ministry God divinely procures the good of the whole material universe, according to Augustine in *De Trinitate* III, 4. These celestial spirits bow down before God because they obey him in everything, as Psalm 102 says, "Bless the Lord, all you his angels, his ministers who do his will." (v.20) Since the angels obey God, it is clear that the whole course of corporeal things which is administered by the angels is subject to the divine will. So no creature can aid man fleeing from the divine vengeance, as Psalm 138 says, "If I climb the heavens, you are there; if I descend to hell, you are there" (v.8) and even more clearly Wisdom, "The whole universe will fight with him against the foolish." (5:21) The kings and princes of the earth who bow down before God can also be understood to be those who carry the world according to Proverbs, "Kings rule through me," (8:15) or because even kings themselves cannot resist divine anger, so that from this he could conclude the same from the major about other things.

Therefore, after he has shown in many ways the immensity of the divine power and the depth of the divine wisdom, he draws the conclusion to the proposition, namely that his intention is not to argue with God. He explains this when he says, "Am I great enough," how powerful and how wise, "to answer him," i.e. to answer the most powerful and most wise God when he interrogates me "and to address him in my own words." This means by examining his deeds and saying, "Why do you do this?" (v.12) as if to say: I am not sufficient to argue with God, for argument consists in answering and making objections. Sometimes although one is not powerful or wise, he is still not afraid to argue with a judge because of the security of his conscience. But Job excludes this reason for disputing with God from his case when he says, "Even if I were somewhat just, I could not answer him at all," with God examining me in defense of my own justice, "but will rather ward off my judge by earnest prayer," not asking for justice, but for mercy. He says clearly, "Even if I were somewhat just," to show the uncertainty of human justice by using the words, "even if I were." As St. Paul says, "I have nothing on my conscience, but I am not justified in this," (1 Cor. 4:4) to show that the justice of man is insignificant and imperfect when related to the divine testing of it he says following Isaiah, "All our just deeds", in his sight, "are like polluted cloth." (64:6)

He shows the consequence of his prayer for pardon when he says, "If I appeal to him and he hears my call, I do believe that he would hear my words." For God sometimes does not hear someone's prayer according to what he wishes, but according to what actually succeeds. Just like a doctor does not heal the plea of the sick man who asks him to take the bitter medicine away, (if the doctor does not remove the remedy he knows to be health inducing, he nevertheless hears the actual advantage of the plea of the patient because he induces the health, which the sick person greatly desires), God does not take away trials from a man set down in the midst of trial, although he prays for mercy, because he knows that trials are useful to final salvation. Thus, although God truly heeds him, nevertheless the man who set down in the midst of miseries does not believe that he is heard. He shows why he does not believe he is heard when he says, "For in the storm, he will wear me away." As is his custom, he now explains what he has said metaphorically saying, "and even multiply wounds without cause." To wear away is to multiply wounds, i.e. trials. This wearing away is in "The storm," in terrifying darkness, which he has said is "without cause," namely, which is not clear and understood by the man who is afflicted. For if an afflicted man should understand the reason why God afflicts him and that the afflictions are useful to his salvation, clearly he would believe that his prayer had been heard. But because he does not understand this, he does not believe that his prayer has been heard. So he not only suffers exteriorly but also interiorly, like an invalid, who does not know that he will achieve health from a bitter cure, would not only suffer from the bad taste (of the medicine), but also in his spirit. He continues, "He will not permit my spirit to rest," for a spirit rests although the flesh is afflicted because of the hope of an end to the affliction, according to what the Lord teaches in Matthew, "Blessed are you when they utter evil against you," and later "Rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven." (5:11, 12) So when I am struck down exteriorly and I do not rest interiorly, "he fills me with bitterness," interiorly and exteriorly.