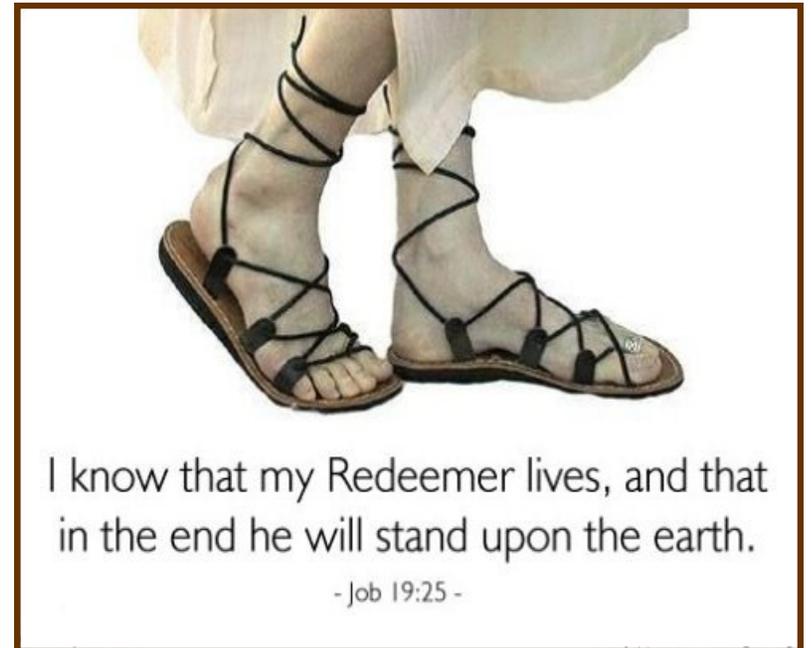


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Job

Chapter Twelve:



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

*What Experience Teaches
Us About God*

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 TWELVE: WHAT EXPERIENCE TEACHES US ABOUT GOD

The First Lesson: God Aids the Humble

1 But Job answered:

2 So are only you men, and will wisdom die with you?

3 I, too, have a heart as you do and this heart is not less than yours. For who is ignorant of the things which you know?

4 Someone who is derided by his friends like I am, will call upon God and he will hear him. For the simplicity of the just man is derided,

5 his light is condemned by the thought of the rich, prepared at the appointed time.

6 The tent of the robbers is abound and they audaciously provoke God, since he has given everything into their hands.

7 Ask the beasts and they will teach you; the birds of the air will be your counselors.

8 Speak to the earth and it will answer you, the fish of the sea will make it known to you.

9 Who does not know that the hand of the Lord made all these things?

10 In whose hand lies the soul of every living thing even the spirit of all human flesh.

***“The Most High rules in all the kingdoms of men,
and He will give to each one what He will.”***

Daniel 4:14

So he then says, “so that they proceed in vain and along a trackless way,” that is, so they proceed by ways which are unfitting, by means of which they cannot arrive at their end. One errs in acting in two ways: first, by ignorance, and regarding this he says, “they will grope in the darkness and not in the light,” so that ignorance is designated by darkness and knowledge by light. Some grope in ignorance like blind men when they only consider what they can feel is right in front of them as if by touch. Some err in another way that is in actions because of their passions, by which their reason is bound in particular choices, so that they do not apply universal knowledge to action. As to this he adds, “and he will make them wander like drunkards,” for their reason is so bound by passion that it is like a kind of drunkenness.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 12

In the preceding chapter Sophar had tried to show that man cannot understand the secrets of the wisdom of God (11:6) to insult Job who seemed almost to demand a debate with God. So one can posit from his words and the words of the other friends that their whole intention was directed to three things. First, they were eager to speak about the wonderful things of God, extolling his wisdom, power, and justice, to make their case appear more favorable. Second, they applied these wondrous things which are accepted by everyone about God to certain false dogmas, specifically, that men prospered in this world because of justice and had tribulations because of sins, and that after this life one should hope for nothing. Third, from these sorts of assertions, they denounced Job as evil because of the adversity which he had suffered, and they promised him certain vain things if he would desert his evil.

This was specifically, that “after he was buried” he would sleep in a “safety” (11:17,18) and that the radiance of noon would rise in the evening for him, promises which Job considered almost derision. Job’s whole response turns around these points. First, he speaks against them because they praised themselves in speaking about certain wondrous things of God as though they alone knew them and Job were ignorant of them. So the text says, “But Job answered: So are only you men?” which follows if you consider yourselves alone to know these things about the greatness of God which all men know. Further, since wisdom consists in the knowledge of the greatness of God, it follows that, if you alone know these things, that wisdom is found only in you, and thus wisdom will pass away when you pass away. So he continues, “and will wisdom die with you?” as if to say: It is not fitting either that you alone are men or that you alone are wise.

Since they could object, 'We are not the only ones who know, but even so, you still do not know,' he answers saying, "I too have a heart," to know these things, "as do you, and this heart is not less than yours," in this knowledge. Lest this be ascribed to arrogance, he continues, "For who is ignorant of these things which you know?" as if to say: It is no great thing if I say I know what you know, since it is no great claim to know them, since every man can know them. But by the fact that you say that I am ignorant of these things, you seem to hold me in contempt as though I am ignorant of things which everyone knows. Thus he says, "Someone who is derided by his friends like I am," as you do when you think me foolish, "will call upon God and he will hear him," because God especially helps those bereft of human aid. As Psalm 26 says, "Though my mother and father abandoned me, yet the Lord raised me." (v.10) In this he attempts to answer Sophar's argument above, "Then you will be able to lift up your head," (11:15) as if to say: I should not wait any longer to pray faithfully because by the very fact that I am derided by my friends, hope is given to me of having recourse to God.

He shows why the one derided by a friend is heard by God saying, "For the simplicity of the just man is deride," when he shows who these just men are, who are derided and why, and also by whom when he continues, "his light is condemned by the thoughts of riches." To be derided is the lot of someone deficient in resources, but to deride is the lot of someone who has a superabundance of possessions. But those who super-abound in virtue do not laugh at those who are deficient in virtues. Rather they have compassion on them and help them if they can. But those who abound in temporal goods often especially deride those who lack temporal goods and especially when they do not show enthusiasm for acquiring temporal goods. But the enthusiasm of just men is not to acquire temporal goods, but to pursue righteousness eagerly, and so they abstain from fraud and the evil intent by which more riches are generally acquired. They are accounted naive because of this. So most people laugh at the just. Moreover, their simplicity is the cause of their mockery, but simplicity is not mocked as a clear evil but as a hidden good, and so here simplicity is called "a light" because of the clarity of justice. So simplicity, is "condemned by the thoughts of the rich" by those who put their end in riches. Truly those who place their highest good in riches must think that goods are greater in proportion to their utility for acquiring riches.

As he had said that such alternation of sublimity and dejection happens among particular persons from God, he shows this same thing among all men saying of them, "who brings growth to the races," so that they increase in the great number of men, "and ruin to them," when he destroys them either by wars or pestilence. "And when they have been overturned," either by these things or from the oppression of one or of many who preside unfairly, "he restores them to integrity," for he returns it to a good condition.

After he has shown there is strength, wisdom, and counsel in God, he finally shows that God is intelligent, understanding by this the knowledge which He has of hidden things, which seem above all to designate what is hidden in the heart. He shows that God knows these things by the fact that he works in the hearts of men, and thus he knows the hidden things of hearts like his own effects. So he says, "It is he who changes the heart of the leaders of the people of the land," with respect to their wills. As Proverbs says, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, who will incline it to whatever he wills." (21:1) Although God inclines the wills of all men, yet special mention is made of kings and princes because their wills carry more weight, for many follow their will. As to the intellect he adds, "he deceives them," which means certainly not that he leads them into falsity, but because he takes his light away from them, so that they may not know the truth, and clouds their reasoning power so that they cannot find suitable means to do the wicked deeds which they propose.

All these things seem to relate to what he had said, "He leads counselors to a foolish end." (v.17)

But the fact that sometimes some are advanced from lower state to the highest seems to relate to what he had said, "and judges to dullness." (v. 17)

As to this he then says, "and those who have been oppressed he relieves," which refers to the weak oppressed by the power of greater men, who are sometimes elevated to a state of power, after those oppressing them are cast aside.

As to those men who have no prestige, but live hidden in the lowest state, he then says, "he reveals those deep in darkness," that is, men placed in a lower state, who are unknown because of this, as though existing in darkness. He leads these to glory by revealing them to others. As to those that are thought foolish and ignorant, he then says, "he kindles the light where death's shadow lay," for the shadow of death seems to be ignorance or stupidity, since the living are distinguished from the nonliving especially by knowledge.

When he added, "he reveals those deep in darkness," he says this in opposition to "he makes the priests inglorious." (19a)

When he next said, "he kindles the light where death's shadow lay," he says this in opposition to everything which follows.

They must have contempt for the simplicity of the just since it is the opposition of the growth of wealth. But although the simplicity itself of the just is condemned in the thoughts of the wealthy, at the same time it is not frustrated from realizing its true end, and so he says, "prepared at the appointed time." However, he does not say this as though at some moment in this present life some earthly prosperity must be given to the just as a reward for his simplicity. Rather he leaves the appointed time undetermined and the end to which the simplicity of the just was prepared. For the argument has not yet arrived at this point, but it will be clarified in the following things. So then Job insinuates in a hidden way why he is derided by his friends whom he calls rich men, because they placed the prosperity of this world as the end of man as if it were the reward of the just man. (cf. c. 2) He, however, does not seek this as a reward in his simplicity, but another at the appointed time. Thus he has faith that if he invoked the Lord he will be heard by him.

Since the rich who deride the simplicity of the just do not stop at this but go as far as contempt of God, he adds, "the tents of the robbers abound." Because some place their end in riches, it follows they search carefully for all the ways to attain this last end either by fraud or by some other manner. So they become robbers who abound in the wealth when they rob. Contempt of God follows from this abundance, and so he adds, "and they audaciously provoke God." For someone acts audaciously when he believes what he is doing is good. For since the conscience is vexed about evil, man does not perpetrate evil without fear, as Wisdom says, "Since iniquity is fearful, it is condemned by all." (Wisdom, 17:10) Those who place their ultimate end in riches, think from this very fact that everything is good which is useful to attain this end. Now it is clear that when they acquire riches by robbery, they provoke God by acting against his justice, and so they consequently audaciously provoke God.

Or, another interpretation is: from riches man becomes so welled with pride he thinks he is sufficient unto himself through them and so he has audacious contempt for God, because he put his confidence in riches. As Deuteronomy says, "The beloved grew fat and disobedient." (Deut. 32:15)

He had said that the tents of robbers who provoke God abounded. So lest someone perhaps object that this kind of abundance is not from God, he says, "since he has given everything into their hands," into their power. For the power to harm someone comes only from God, but the will to do evil comes only from oneself. (cf. c. 1) By the fact then that they rob they provoke God, but their resulting abundance comes to them from God. He proves this as a consequence when he continues, "Ask the beasts and they will teach you, the birds of the air will be your counselors; Speak to the earth and it will answer you, the fish of the sea will make it known to you." He shows that all these things answer when asked, "Who does not know that the hand of the Lord made all these things?" So, then, all things confess that they have been made by God. Man asks creatures when he diligently considers them. But they respond to the questioner when in considering them, he perceives that there is such a great order found in their disposition of parts and in the order of their actions that they could exist only governed by the disposition of some superior wisdom. If, however, creatures of this sort were made by God, it is evident that they are in the power of God as artifacts in the power of the artisan, and so he adds, "In whose hand," in whose power "lies the soul of every living thing," not only of other animals, "and even the spirit of all human flesh." If, then, they are in his power, it is clear that no one can have them, except from him, as Daniel says, "The Most High rules in all the kingdoms of men, and he will give to each one what he will." (4:14) So it is evident that no man can possess the earth and the animals spoken of above which are the wealth of man unless God will give them into his hand. So if robbers prosper, God gave it into their hands. By this opinion he refutes those who asserted that wealth is given by God as a reward for justice, since wealth is even given to thieves by God.

Since he has said this in a general way, he now makes it clear by specific examples, showing how all things which seem excellent in human affairs are brought by the depth of divine counsel "to a foolish end" and "to dullness." In human affairs, kings excel with respect to power. As to them he says, "The belt," that is the swordbelt, "of kings he loosens," for their power is designated in their swordbelt, according to the Psalm 44, "Gird your sword upon your thigh, O mighty one: (v.4); "and he girds their loins with ropes," when they are led into captivity, in which he notes the complete failing of their power. Priests excel by the reverence in which they are held, concerning which he adds, "he makes the priests inglorious." The first men and counselors in a kingdom or a city seem to excel in the prudence of their advice, and he says regarding them, "and he dispossesses the nobles," that is, he deceives them. Philosophers excel in the consideration of the truth. He says regarding these, "He alters the truth from their lips," i.e. the lips of those who are eager to speak the truth. For God sometimes darkens the mind of those men by taking away his grace so that they cannot find the truth, and, consequently cannot speak it, as Romans says, "Saying that they were wise, they have become foolish." (1:22) Old men also excel in the direction of the young, and in their regard he continues, "he takes away instruction from the elders," either because old men are made fools of, or because they are completely taken out of society, as Isaiah says, "the Lord will take away from Jerusalem the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder." (Is. 3:1) Princes excel in the authority which they have for ruling others, and he says about these, "he pours contempt on princes," so that they are despised by those who should obey them.

Thus just as one says that there is reason in God, insofar as he knows the order of principles with respect to their consequences; yet it does not belong to him to investigate anything by the method of reasoning as reason does.

Thus counsel is attributed to him not, by the method of investigation, but by way of simple and absolute knowledge. The depth of a man's counsel can depend on two things.

First, when from the ingenuity of his counsel he leads his adversaries (even though they may seem skilled in counsels) to the necessary fact that they must arrive at an unfitting conclusion when all their means prove inadequate. To this he says, "He leads counselors to a foolish end," when by the profundity of his counsel he keeps them from the means by which they seek to attain such an end.

Second, someone shows the depth of his counsel when he can lead his adversaries by the subtlety of his counsel to ignore what they ought to do. To this he says, "and judges to dullness." He calls judges wise who usually have the habit of right judgment about what should be done. Just as in speculative disputes someone is called a skilled debater who can lead his adversary into an erroneous conclusion, or can so prove some proposition that nothing can be said against it, so God does against his adversaries.

Since by ways which they themselves chose, he both leads them to perdition, and so he strengthens his truth and works so that they cannot be shaken by his adversaries.

The Second Lesson: God rules Everything

11 Does not the ear judge words and the mouth of one eating flavor? 12 There is wisdom in the ancients and prudence comes with advanced age. 13 With him is wisdom and courage; he has counsel and understanding. 14 If he destroys something, there is no one who rebuilds; and if he closes a man in, there is no one to free him. 15 If he will withhold the rain, everything will dry up, and if he will send the rain, it will cover the earth. 16 With him is strength and wisdom, he knows the one who deceives and the one who is deceived. 17 He leads counselors to a foolish end and judges to dullness. 18 The belt of kings he loosens and he girds their loins with ropes; 19 he makes the priests inglorious and he dispossesses the nobles. 20 He alters the truth from their lips and takes away instruction from the elders. 21 He pours contempt on princes. Those who have been oppressed he relieves. 22 He reveals those deep in darkness and he kindles light where death's shadow lay. 23 He brings growth to the races and ruin to them, and when they are overturned he restores them to integrity. 24 It is he who changes the heart of the leaders of the people of the land and he deceives them so that they proceed in vain along a trackless way: 25 they will grope in darkness and not in the light, and he makes them wander like drunkards.

Job asserted above (v.2) that what Sophar had said about the excellence of the greatness of God that was evident to all men. Here he intends to show that men can come to an understanding of these things by the experience of divine power and wisdom in human affairs. First, then, he shows how men arrive at knowledge in things from experience, saying, "Does not the ear judge words" namely when it hears them, "and" does not "the palate of one eating," distinguish "flavor". Since experience is from sense, he fittingly shows the power of experience for the judgment of the senses especially in hearing and taste. For, since hearing is the most teachable of all the senses, hence it is most valuable in the contemplative sciences. Taste, however, is appreciative of food, which is necessary for the life of men; and the hence through the judgment of taste he expresses the experience which one has about things in the active life. Because of this, from the judgment of the two senses, he shows the power of experience as much in speculative things as in practical things. When he then says, "There is wisdom in the ancients," this expresses the contemplative life because old men heard many things. "Prudence comes with advanced age." This express the active life because men taste many things in a long life, both helpful and harmful.

After he has shown the power of experience, he then adds what men can know by experience about God when he says, "With him is wisdom and courage, he has counsel and understanding." Here he attributes four things to God which have an order among themselves. The first, certainly, is to know hidden things, which pertains to understanding. Second, from the things he understands one discovers in actions means which are fitting for an end. This pertains to the counsel just as in speculative things, by also those things which a man understands he deduces reasons to know certain conclusions. The third is for the purpose of having a right judgment about the things which man investigates, which pertains to wisdom. The fourth is that he might vigorously execute those things which he judges ought to be done, and this pertains to fortitude.

For since experience proceeds from sensible things, which although prior as to our way of being, are yet simply and in their nature posterior, he therefore begins to show how men can know divine power by experience. He does this first in human affairs themselves. For we can see that some men are totally destroyed, either by death, as far as natural being, or by complete humiliation, as to life in civil society even though they still have many protectors. So when they cannot be helped by men to escape destruction, it is clear that this happens to from some concealed cause both, divine and excelling human power, since human power cannot resist him. This is what he says, "If he destroys, there is no one who rebuilds." In the same way we see that some are impeded in their projects, even if they are not completely destroyed, although they may have many counselors. Thus it is clear that this destruction also results from by some more excellent power. So he then says, "if he closes a man in," by involving him in different kinds of difficulties, "there is no one to free him," i.e. who can set him free, for according to Qoheleth, "No one can correct him whom God has despised." (7:14)

Then he shows how men can experience divine power in natural things, especially in rains and droughts. So he says, "If he will withhold the rain," so that it does not fall, "everything will dry up," which grows on the earth. "If he will send the rain," in great abundance, "it will cover the earth," as in floods. Although from some natural causes the rains sometimes cease to the point of a complete drought and sometimes are so heavy they flood the earth, this still does not detract from divine power which has ordered even natural causes themselves to their proper effects. Thus, as a conclusion from these premises he says, "With him is strength."

Then he begins to progress to the second point, saying, "and wisdom," as though proposing what he intends to clarify. For it is a property of wisdom that through it one may have right judgment about things.

The man judges correctly about the truth of things who can discern how someone is deceived in turning aside from the truth. Thus, to show that in God there is wisdom, he then says, "he knows the one who deceives and the one who is deceived," that is, he discerns by right judgment the deception by which someone neglects the truth from a right understanding of the truth. He supposes this from what he and the friends hold in common; which is that human affairs are subjected to divine judgment, which God could not judge unless he knew man's sins, among which frauds and deceptions hold a great place.

Then he shows that there is counsel in God by those things which appear in human affairs.

On this point, consider that as God knows both the principles and conditions of speculative sciences and their order to one another, and he still does not acquire knowledge of the conclusions through the principles, but he knows all things in the first, simple glance. In the same way, in practical matters we know the end and those things which are for the end and what ways are most expeditious for attaining the end, but he does not inquire as to the means in view of the end as we do when we take counsel.