

PART 11: CHAPTER 2, VERSES 2-3

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

Verse 2. "And the Lord said to the adversary, 'From where do you come?' And the adversary answered the Lord, and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down in it.'"

Verse 3. "And the Lord said to the adversary, have you considered my servant Iyov, that there is none like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears G-d and turns away from evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause."

Commentary

G-d's inquiry and the adversary's response about his whereabouts is similar to their exchange in chapter 1 verse 7. The Talmud, in tractate *Bava Bathra* p.16a, elucidates several verses in this chapter. It describes the adversary as one who first "descends and entices, (then) ascends and prosecutes, and (finally) receives permission and kills." This is obviously the Talmud's interpretation of the words of the adversary in this verse; "..... and the adversary answered G-d and said, from going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down in it." The Talmud goes on to describe the adversary as having three titles; "Satan, the evil inclination, and the angel of death." *Rashi* explains this to mean that the adversary fulfills three tasks.

1. He creates confusion in the minds of people to cause them to transgress the will of G-d. = evil inclination
2. Then he prosecutes the violators before the heavenly court. = Satan
3. He executes the judgment by delivering harm or death to the accused. = angel of death

The adversary manifests itself in different ways. Whereas the evil inclination seems to be an integral part of us, the Satan is an other-worldly phenomenon. The angel of death usually comes in the form of harmful physical forces beyond our control.

The adversary reports to G-d that he has just finished another year of activities. He has nothing to

say about *Iyov*, presumably because there was nothing negative that could be said about him. This is evident from G-d's testimony on his behalf. But this time G-d complains about the adversary's most recent activities against *Iyov*. The whole purpose of the adversary's inditement of *Iyov* was to prove that he serves G-d with a selfish desire to preserve his wealth. This could easily be demonstrated if G-d would remove *Iyov*'s incredible material blessings.

If *Iyov* would remain loyal in the face of devastating personal and financial loss G-d could convincingly refute the claims of the adversary. Up to this point *Iyov* remains entirely righteous despite the horrific suffering he experienced. *Iyov*'s commitment is based upon pure love and devotion with no expectation of personal gain. G-d's complaint is that the adversary needlessly incited him to allow the persecution of *Iyov*.

The *Malbim* explains that G-d's comment to the adversary in verse three exonerates *Iyov* from the accusation that his service of G-d is an exercise in self aggrandizement. G-d accuses the adversary of causing needless suffering as is reflected in the statement: "You moved me against him, to destroy him -without cause-." The implication is that G-d is not inclined to allow human suffering unless there is some actual benefit to the inflicted party. G-d is annoyed because the suffering of *Iyov* has apparently brought him no benefit it was "without cause."

Summary

We might ask ourselves at this point the following. Why did G-d allow the adversary to inflict such pain and suffering upon *Iyov* while knowing the futility of his efforts? 'The question of a wise man is half the answer', so goes the popular proverb.

G-d does not condone aimless suffering. His expression of disapproval of the adversary's activity is in reality a statement of policy; there can be no suffering in this world without meaning.

In fact *Iyov* had already benefited greatly from this test. The *Ramban* explains that as a result of his suffering he elevated himself to an unprecedented level of love and devotion to G-d. G-d's disapproval of the adversary's activity is actually a call to intensify the test in order to bring even greater results.

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