

PART 12: CHAPTER 2, VERSES 3-10

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

Dear Subscribers,

Many of you have remarked on the apparent injustice to the children of *Iyov*. Now is not the time to go in to this in great detail, however, I do want to mention that many commentators are of the opinion that *Iyov's* children were not killed. According to this view they were captured and held hostage until *Iyov's* test was over and then returned to him. (Stay tuned)

Verses 3-6

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.'"

Verse 4. "And the adversary answered the Lord, and said, 'Skin covers skin! for all that a man has he will give for his life.'"

Verse 5. "But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

Verse 6. "And the Lord said to the adversary, 'Behold he is in your hands; but save his life.'"

Commentary

The adversary answers that it is possible that *Iyov* is more concerned with his own welfare than the loss of his children and possessions. If so, the test is not yet complete. One could still argue that *Iyov* serves G-d due to fear of retribution or personal loss more than out of love for G-d.

Everyone would give the clothing off their body to save their life from danger. We would even surrender our skin, if necessary, to save our internal organs. The essence of life lies deep within us and cannot be defined by external possessions.

Therefore, the adversary argues, Iyov's passive acceptance of the loss of his children and material possessions does not prove that he serves G-d from love. The only way to test this is to threaten Iyov's very being. G-d agrees, with one condition. The adversary is not allowed to take his life only to threaten it in a way that would cause Iyov to think that he is going to die. The Talmud states that Iyov's affliction was so mortal that the adversary had to take special precautions that he would not die.

The sages o"bm likened this to a servant who is instructed by his master to break the outer shell of a barrel but leave it strong enough to retain the wine. Similarly the adversary was instructed by G-d to inflict Iyov's body to the point that it could still sustain his soul, but no more.

The *Maharsha* explains this analogy in the following way. The body of the human being is likened to a barrel and his soul to wine. Just as the barrel protects and facilitates convenient usage of the wine, the body acts as a vessel to protect and aid the soul. In the same way that the wine is wasted unless there is a vessel to facilitates its use, the soul cannot achieve its purpose without the assistance of the body. No straight thinking person would value the barrel more than the wine. Only a fool regards his body more than his soul.

Verses 7-10

Verse 7. "So the adversary went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Iyov with vile sores from the sole of his foot to his crown."

Verse 8. "And he took him a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and he sat down among the ashes."

Verse 9. "Then his wife said to him, 'Do you still retain your integrity? Curse G-d, and die.'"

Verse 10. "But he said to her, 'You speak as the foolish women speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of G-d, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this Iyov did not sin with his lips."

Commentary

The *Midrash* states that Iyov had two types of sores. The top half of his body was covered with dry sores while his lower half was afflicted with puss filled boils. To relieve the pain of the upper body he took a potsherd to scratch the sores. The boils on the lower half of his body required the drying effect of the sand, so he buried himself in earth. Iyov's pain is compounded by the complicated nature of his afflictions. The remedy for the top half of his body was harmful to his lower body and vice versa.

We would expect that *Iyov's* closest loved ones would comfort him in this hopeless state of physical distress. *Iyov*, however, is not so fortunate. Even his wife does not comfort him. Instead she taunts him by reminding him of the blessing he offered to G-d after hearing about the loss of his children and possessions. The only results that this brought was his present state of pain and anguish.

The *Malbim* explains that she ridicules her husband for retaining his integrity and loyalty to G-d. If *Iyov* were to continue in this path his next blessing may bring him death. In her eyes this would not necessarily be such a tragedy compared to the horrific suffering he experienced up to this point. Obviously this was not a very comforting approach. In addition to the physical pain *Iyov* suffers enormous emotional pain at the hands of his own wife.

Summary

Despite all of this *Iyov* does not sin with his lips. The Talmud understands this to mean that in his heart he did sin. The adversary is beginning to achieve results.

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