

PART 16: CHAPTER 3, VERSES 20-26

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

Verse 20. *"Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul;"*

Verse 21. *"Who long for death, but it does not come;"*

Verse 22. *"And dig for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find a grave?"*

Verse 23. *"Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and from whom G-d has screened himself?"*

Verse 24. *"For my sighing comes before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters."*

Verse 25. *"For the thing which I had feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come to me."*

Verse 26. *"I had no repose, nor had I rest, nor was I quiet; yet trouble came."*

Commentary

Iyov continues his indictment of everything and anything. Yes, there are people who are blessed with good fortune in this world. But does that justify or compensate for the misery of the multitudes of sufferers in the world? It appears that Iyov is blaming the fortunate ones for the unfortunate who must endure life. If there would be no life at all the unfortunate would not suffer. Why should the unfortunate suffer through the 'gift' of life that is appreciated only by the fortunate?

"Why is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul; who long for death, but it does not come; and dig for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find a grave?"

Light is a great blessing. It ushers in the good of a new day. But for those who suffer the light of a new day is a curse. 'One man's cup of tea is the other man's poison', so goes the old adage. A new day of life brings with it new pain and suffering. For the unfortunate the new break of dawn ushers in another day of hope and anticipation of the end.

Alas, the end can be insured only by death. As absurd as it sounds, death itself becomes the *raison d'être*. But death is allusive. It always seems to skip over the unfortunate when they are in greatest need of it. They have only bad luck, their life is filled with misery and anguish. Death would be a gift, and that would be totally inconsistent with their life of misfortune. After all, they are destined to suffer, that is their lot.

So the unfortunate must suffer. But that does not mean that they have no hopes and desires. The unfortunate can be as focused and determined as the fortunate. They can strive for a goal that will bring them gladness and joy.

In their misery-twisted minds death is the greatest of all gifts and they seek it like riches. Only death is the balm for their aching soul. When it finally comes they will be happy. All forms of delusion are dangerous but this attitude is clearly self-destructive. Life itself ceases to have any meaning at all. Effort to succeed is futile because 'success' is death and the equality of death obviates the need to succeed.

The *Malbim* interprets this verse in a different way. When does death present itself? When one least expects it. The climax of misfortune occurs when the sufferer is about to attain some hope of good fortune. Just as he is about to discover 'hidden treasures' death strikes with cruel surprise.

Those who suffer can never prosper because suffering is their destiny and duty. Often they must do it in a 'big way'. So *Iyov* is the quintessential sufferer. He acquires wealth, fortune and fame only to tragically lose it all.

Iyov concludes that he has never had a good life. Even during his years of prosperity he suffered the constant fear of losing it. The wisest of all men put it like this: "...the prosperity of the rich man does not allow him any rest." (Ecclesiastes, 5:11). The elements of his good fortune turn into the bitter bile of misfortune.

The poor man who never experienced wealth and fame will not miss them. *Iyov* knew the taste of the good-life and when he lost it the pain was intense.

At this point *Iyov* is dangerously depressed. Not only does the pain obscure his understanding of the present and hopes for the future, it corrupts his memory of the past. His previous happiness and good fortune are all forgotten. In fact he denies that they ever existed. In retrospect his entire life is one long nightmare that he wishes would come to a quick end. Death is the only viable option in his fatalistic mind.

The *Medrash Rabbo*, Exodus 30: 11, likens *Iyov* to a drunkard who goes on a rampage to destroy a prison and releases all of the prisoners. Then he proceeds to smash the statue of the king who judged the prisoners. Only later when he is confronted by the king himself does he become aware of his foolish conduct.

One possible interpretation of this *medrash* is that *Iyov* is intoxicated with pain. The prisoners are the

living who are incarcerated in a bitter life. The king is G-d. Iyov views the living as prisoners of a destiny that is outside of their control. They are shackled by the forces of power beyond them.

Just as prisoners do not have the privilege to exercise their own free-will to determine their future, so too man is not capable of influencing or changing his fate. It is interesting that the *medrash* refers to a statue of the king. The king himself is not near the prison and most likely knows little about what is going on there. Iyov believes in G-d but the incongruity of a just G-d and human suffering forces him to remove G-d from the arena of human existence. G-d is reduced to a statue that represents a great power but has little to do with reality.

Summary

Many 'thinking' people have come to a similar conclusion about G-d after experiencing or witnessing personal pain or tragedy. They simply cannot live with the notion that G-d is 'out there' and remains passive in the face of horrific human suffering. The paradox of this theology is that rejection of the G-d of justice eventually promotes injustice and suffering by eliminating any source of absolute and immutable morality.

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