

PART 21: CHAPTER 4, VERSES 6 - 11

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

- 6. Is not thy fear of G-d thy confidence, and thy hope and integrity of thy ways?*
- 7. Recall, now, who that was innocent ever perished? or where were the upright cut off?*
- 8. Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.*
- 9. By the breath of G-d they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.*
- 10. The roar of the lion, and the cry of the fierce lion, and the teeth of the young lions, are broken.*
- 11. The old lion perishes for lack of prey, and the lion's whelps are scattered abroad.*

Commentary:

In last weeks lesson we mentioned the Malbim's interpretation of verse 6. (They will say that) your fear of G-d was (to gain) confidence (that your good lot would continue), and the perfection of your ways was in order to achieve your hope (for a good future).

In other words, now there is proof that Iyov is not the perfect selfless servant of G-d that he was reputed to be. As you may recall, this is the accusation that the adversary-Satan raised in the beginning of the book. Now Elifaz testifies for the prosecution. Iyov's devotion to G-d is based upon selfish motivations and therefore he deserves no mitigation of judgment.

Iyov considered himself to be absolutely righteous and cannot accept that his suffering was ordained by G-d. Instead he views his troubles as the result of a predetermined cosmic plan that indiscriminately effects the righteous as well as the wicked. Elifaz is angered by Iyov's rash and erroneous conclusions. In verse 7 Elifaz challenges Iyov to bring evidence to support his conclusions. He prods Iyov to recall the names of the totally righteous who have perished. Elifaz is somewhat cynical in his argumentation. If Iyov cannot recall the names of such people perhaps he

can remember the name of a place where such perversions of justice occurred.

Meanwhile, in verse 8 Elifaz claims to remember many wicked people who perished. The wicked plant the seeds of their own destruction. Ultimately they must reap the bitter fruits of their evil, hence "they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same." Elifaz points out an interesting phenomenon. We tend to attach more significance to the bad things that happen to good people than the bad things that happen to bad people. When the righteous suffer we take on the task of judging G-d. When the wicked fail we often satisfy ourselves with the colloquialism 'he got what he deserved' and quickly forget.

This is a stark contrast to the teaching of our sages o"bm. In the weekly Torah reading parshat Shmeeny (Leviticus 9:3) Rashi brings the view of the sages that when the righteous are punished G-d's name is sanctified. This is vividly conveyed in the story of the two sons of Aharon the Cohen who are tragically consumed by a flame from heaven. Moses' response is startling. "And Moshe said to Aharon; this is what G-d said, through those who are close to me I am sanctified..." Since most people tend to view themselves more like the righteous than the wicked, the punishment of the righteous arouses in us an acute sense of awe and respect for G-d. If the truly righteous are subject to such severe judgment how much more must we be conscientious in our conduct.

In order to better understand the argument of Elifaz it is important that we bear in mind the distinction that the Ramban points out in his commentary. The enigma of the suffering of the righteous exists only with a person who is absolutely righteous in the eyes of G-d. If he is guilty of even one transgression of G-d's will the issue of his suffering no longer stands in glaring contradiction to the concept of an interactive righteous G-d. It may be a bitter pill to swallow but it does not contravene Divine justice.

Elifaz accuses Iyov of not being qualified to properly evaluate the integrity of Divine justice. Is it possible for a human being to know the value of any person in the eyes of G-d? How can we determine the degree of righteousness of any human being and become the judges of G-d? Iyov is a perfect example of this. He was thought to be the perfect servant of G-d in the eyes of his peers. Now his true colors show through. Rather than a perversion of Divine justice, Elifaz argues that Iyov's tragedies are most likely the result of his own of guilt.

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