

## PART 27: CHAPTER 5, VERSES 1 - 11

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

- 1. Call out, is there anyone who answers you; to which of the holy angels can you turn?*
- 2. Because the foolish man is slain by anger, and envy and anger causes the death of one driven by sensuality.*
- 3. I have seen the foolish taking root; and suddenly I cursed his dwelling, saying,*
- 4. Let his children be far from safety, and let them be crushed in the gate, with none to rescue them.*
- 5. Let the hungry eat up his harvest, and take it to the thorn hedges, and let the thirsty swallow up their substance.*
- 6. For affliction does not come out of the dust, nor does trouble spring out of the ground;*
- 7. But man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*
- 8. But I would seek to G-d, and to G-d I would commit my cause:*
- 9. Who does great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number:*
- 10. Who gives rain upon the earth, and sends water upon the fields:*
- 11. To set up on high those who are low; that those who mourn may be exalted to safety.*

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### Commentary:

In verse #3 Elifaz begins a new line of attack on Iyov. Iyov claims that man does not have free-will. He is an object of fate or fortune, not the master of his own destiny. Elifaz refutes this approach based on some very simple observations "I have seen the foolish taking root etc."

Iyov's ideology is based on the observation that many people attempt to succeed in life but fail to do

so regardless of their diligent efforts. Furthermore, many people achieve great success despite their total lack of earnest effort. Elifaz describes this lucky bunch as fools and curses them. It is not clear at this point why he refers to them as fools. Nor is it clear why Elifaz 'curses' these people.

The commentary of the Metzudas David explains that this verse relates a discussion that Elifaz conducts with himself whenever he observes the fluke fortune of the wealthy. Many people are jealous of these wealthy. Not Elifaz, he immediately evaluates the situation with a critical eye. If their wealth was amassed in any way other than dedication and honest hard work he reminds himself that their success will be short lived. Ultimately they will suffer loss and grief. Even their children will not be spared from misfortune. Their father's "success", no doubt, created a lot of envy and malevolence. When his downfall begins no one will extend a helping hand, not even to his children. This is obviously an allusion to the fact that Iyov's children suffered for no apparent reason.

It seems that Elifaz is saying that the children of the wicked do not suffer due to an act of Divine punishment, but as a direct consequence of their fathers iniquity. This is not a curse, it is coarse reality. This is an important distinction to make when discussing the issue of human misfortune. Too often we forget that a significant amount of suffering in the world is not G-d's fault. Much of what we see is the inevitable consequence of man's evil and the foolishness of his deeds.

Elifaz curses them that their success will have no permanence. Riches and wealth, effortlessly acquired on easy-street, disappear with the same ease. #5 "Let the hungry eat up his harvest, and take it to the thorn hedges, and let the thirsty swallow up their substance." The Malbim explains that this verse is not a prediction but an observation. The hungry have no reserves to rely upon; only after hard work can they enjoy the fruits of their labor. Even worse are those who suffer from abject poverty. They are like people who need to pick the thorns from their harvest before they can satiate their terrible hunger. The amount they produce is so little, and of such inferior quality, that the thorns are more bountiful than the edible crop.

These same deprived people will swallow up the wealth of the foolish like a tired man inhales air. The wicked often abuse others in order to achieve success. Hap and fortuity may bring wealth but eventually it is inherited by those who deserve it.

#6. "For affliction does not come out of the dust, nor does trouble spring out of the ground;" The Malbim explains the verse in this way: The "dust" covers the "ground." Deep in the ground the seeds sprout and grow until they break through the surface of the ground that is covered with the dust. The Hebrew words "oven" and "omol" in this verse are translated here as "affliction" and "trouble." Before a person preforms an act of wickedness [that 'afflicts' others] he conceives the idea in his mind [indeed, a 'troubled' mind]. Only after the idea has been conceptualized is the act preformed. These two stages are paralleled by "the dust [and] the ground." Just as growth takes place deep in the ground so too wicked thoughts are conceived deep in the mind. Only later do they spring into action just as the plant breaks through the surface of the ground.

One who acquires wealth through trickery and duplicity will not see blessings from his efforts. Elifaz curses them that their thoughts will not take root, nor will their deeds bare everlasting fruits.

#7. "But man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." This is translation follows [more or less] the explanation of Rashi. Accordingly, it is a continuation of verse #6. So it would read like this: "For affliction does not come out of the dust, nor does trouble spring out of the ground. But man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Rashi understands these verses in the following way. The calamities that befall a man are not haphazard, they do not randomly sprout from the ground. Rather, they are the result of his own iniquity. Man cannot completely escape wrong doing; he is "born to trouble." The "sparks" refer to G-d's celestial creatures. They are not afflicted with an inclination to evil. They are above sin. It is their task to mete out corrective measures to those who violate G-d's will.

To be continued...

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