

PART 9: CHAPTER 1, VERSES 12 - 22

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

12. Then the Lord said to Satan, everything he owns is now in your control. Just do not harm Job. Then Satan went out from G-d's presence.
13. One day, when Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.
14. A messenger came to Job saying, "The oxen were plowing and the asses were grazing beside them.
15. When men from Sheva attacked. They stole the animals and killed the servants at knife point. I'm the only one who survived to tell you."
16. While he was speaking, another servant came and said, "G-d's fire fell from heaven and burned up the sheep, the servants, and destroyed everything. I'm the only one who survived to tell you."
17. While he was speaking another servant came and said, "Casdeem split into three groups, they grabbed the camels and killed the servants by sword and only I escaped to tell you."
18. While he was still speaking, another servant came, saying, your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house.
19. when a strong wind came from the wilderness and destroyed the four corners of the house. It collapsed upon your children and they are dead. I'm the only one that survived to tell you."
20. So Job got up, ripped his coat and shaved his head. He fell down on the ground.
21. And said, "Naked I came out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed is G-d's name."
22. During all this Job did not sin and he did not denounce G-d.

Commentary

I would like to add the following thought on the Ramban's view on the testing of the righteous. G-d created the universe from his unlimited potential. Classical Torah thought views the creation as an emanation of G-d's wisdom and power. We know from the story of creation in the book of Genesis that man was created in the image of G-d. This means that we have have some of the same characteristics as G-d. We too have tremendous wisdom and potential. Just as G-d created a physical reality from his unlimited potential man is also capable of turning his own immense potential into physical reality. That is the purpose of creation. G-d tests the righteous to help them achieve this.

Verse 12

The Satan leaves G-d's presence. One of the names of G-d in Hebrew, there are many, designates him as the one who continuously brings everything into existence. This means that G-d imbues creation with a life sustaining energy. Without this uninterrupted infusion the entire universe would cease to exist. Any interruption or interference in the flow of divine sustenance inevitably causes harm and damage. In light of this we can understand the significance of the Satan leaving the presence of G-d. His departure from G-d symbolizes an obstruction in the flow of divine sustenance. The result was horrific. Immediately following the Satan's departure we are informed of Iyov's first tragedy.

Verse 13

What is the significance of the exact time of Iyov's troubles? The Malbim explains that this reinforces the point that Iyov was not being punished for any sin. In verse 5 we were informed that Iyov brought special sacrifices on the feast days to atone for any impure thoughts or feelings that his children may have entertained. It is reasonable to assume that the offerings were effective. Iyov troubles cannot be attributed to the sins of his children since he had already taken the necessary steps to atone for them.

Verse 14-19

Maimonides describes three different types of destruction:

1. Natural disasters, including freak violent eruptions of natural forces.
2. Harm inflicted by human beings upon each other, e.g., negligence, crime , war, etc.
3. Harm that we inflict upon ourselves through unhealthy and perilous life styles, e.g., lust, folly,

vice, etc.

The Satan brings the first two forms of harm upon Iyov. Sheva and the Casdeem were motivated by greed and the desire for power. Iyov was the victim of their wickedness. The fire and the wind belong to the first category. Fire falling from heaven is certainly an unusual occurrence. Nevertheless, fire is a natural phenomenon. All of these calamities occurred in a rapid progression. Iyov had no respite, no chance to collect himself before he was informed of the next tragedy.

The intense pain of personal tragedy is usually delayed due to the impact of the initial shock. By the time that Iyov recovered from the initial shock of these four tragedies he had to cope with the combined pain of all of them together.

Verse 20

Why did Iyov stand? The Malbim explains that he did so to bless G-d. Similarly the halacha requires one who suffers misfortune to stand up and bless G-d, "Blessed are you G-d our Lord, King of the universe, the Judge of true justice". This is a poignant demonstration of Iyov's still unwavering faith and acceptance of G-d's judgment.

Verse 21-22

The Vilna Gaon explains that there are four reasons not to complain about personal misfortune.

1. We are born with absolutely no possessions besides our own body. The objects that we acquire are not inherent. Therefore, to lose them should not be devastating. For this reason Iyov comforted himself "Naked I came out of my mother's womb..."
2. The grave is the destiny of every man. Popular wisdom tells us "you can't take it with you" and therefore Iyov concludes "naked shall I return there". There is no point to anguish over such temporal trivialities.
3. It appears to us that our successes are the fruits of our own efforts. In reality our success in acquiring physical possessions comes through the help of G-d. The best example of this is the story of Jacob's sheep. In the book of Genesis we are told of Jacob's efforts to produce speckled offspring from solid colored sheep. He placed speckled twigs in the drinking trough of the sheep. The image of the speckled twigs was suppose to cause the sheep to bare offspring similar to the images in front of their eyes immediately before copulation. This peculiar theory of animal husbandry was obviously accepted practice in those days. Be that as it may, it seemed to work. But we are informed later on in the story that Jacob tells his wives that he had a vision of angels that miraculously transported Lavan's speckled sheep to mate with his solid colored sheep. Clearly Jacob's success was a gift from G-d. But to the untrained

eye it appeared to be the result of Jacob's astute planning. Iyov proclaims "The Lord gave....", consoling himself that it is not proper to bemoan the loss of gifts that he did nothing to deserve.

4. "and the Lord has taken away" If Iyov's losses became someone else's gains there might have been room for complaints. Iyov did not view it like that. Sheva and the Casdeem were the agents of G-d to deliver the divine judgment. It was G-d who took, not man. Iyov's conclusion, "Blessed is G-d's name..... and he did not denounce G-d."

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The author is the Rosh Hayeshiva (Dean) of [Orchos Chaim Yeshiva](#) in Jerusalem.