

The Book of JOB

TRANSLATED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Stephen Mitchell

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TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

PROLOGUE:
The Legend

Once upon a time, in the land of Uz, there was a man named Job. He was a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and avoided evil. He had seven sons and three daughters; seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred donkeys; and also many slaves. He was the richest man in the East.

Every year, his sons would hold a great banquet, in the house of each of them in turn, and they would invite their sisters to come feast with them. When the week of celebration was over, Job would have them come to be purified; for he thought, "Perhaps my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Job did this every year.

One year, on the day when the angels come to testify before the Lord, the Accusing Angel came too.

The Lord said to the Accuser, "Where have you come from?"

The Accuser answered, "From walking here and there on the earth, and looking around."

The Lord said, "Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him: a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and avoids evil."

The Accuser said, "Doesn't Job have a good reason for being so good? Haven't you put a hedge around him—himself and his whole family and everything he has? You bless whatever he does, and the land is teeming with his cattle. But just reach out and strike everything he has, and I bet he'll curse you to your face."

The Lord said, "All right: everything he has is in your power. Just don't lay a hand on him."

Then the Accuser left.

That same day, as Job's sons and daughters were feasting in the house of the eldest brother, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys grazing and the Sabeans attacked and took them and killed the boys and only I escaped to tell you." Before he had finished speaking, another one came and said, "Lightning fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and boys and only I escaped to tell you." Before he had finished speaking, another one came and said, "Chaldeans attacked the camels and took them and killed the boys and only I escaped to tell you." Before he had finished speaking, another one came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and a great wind came out of the desert and knocked down the walls of the house and it fell on them and they're dead and only I escaped to tell you."

Then Job stood up. He tore his robe. He shaved his head. He lay down with his face in the dust. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken; may the name of the Lord be blessed."

Once again, on the day when the angels come to testify before the Lord, the Accusing Angel came too.

The Lord said to the Accuser, "Where have you come from?"

The Accuser answered, "From walking here and there on the earth, and looking around."

The Lord said, "Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him: a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and avoids evil. He is holding on to his innocence, even after you made me torment him for no reason."

The Accuser said, "So what? A man will give up everything he has, to save his own skin. But just reach out and strike his flesh and bones, and I bet he'll curse you to your face."

The Lord said, "All right: he is in your power. Just don't kill him."

Then the Accuser left.

He covered Job with boils, from his scalp to the soles of his feet. Job took a piece of broken pottery to scratch himself with, and sat down in the dust.

His wife said to him, "How long will you go on clinging to your innocence? Curse God, and die."

Job said, "Foolish woman, have you lost your mind? We have accepted good fortune from God; surely we can accept bad fortune too."

Now Job had three friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Namathite. When these friends heard of all the calamities that had come upon him, each of them left his own country to mourn with Job and to comfort him. They met at an appointed place and went on together. When they arrived and saw Job from a distance, they could barely recognize him. They cried out, and tore their clothing, and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat with him for seven days and seven nights. And no one said a word, for they saw how great his suffering was.

The Curse

FINALLY JOB CRIED OUT:

God damn the day I was born
and the night that forced me from the womb.
On that day—let there be darkness;
let it never have been created;
let it sink back into the void.
Let chaos overpower it;
let black clouds overwhelm it;
let the sun be plucked from its sky.
Let oblivion overshadow it;
let the other days disown it;
let the aeons swallow it up.
On that night—let no child be born,
no mother cry out with joy.
Let sorcerers wake the Serpent
to blast it with eternal blight.
Let its last stars be extinguished;
let it wait in terror for daylight;
let its dawn never arrive.
For it did not shut the womb's doors
to shelter me from this sorrow.

Why couldn't I have died
as they pulled me out of the dark?
Why were there knees to hold me,
breasts to keep me alive?
If only I had strangled or drowned
on my way to the bitter light.

Now I would be at rest,
I would be sound asleep,
with kings and lords of the earth
who lived in echoing halls,
with princes who hoarded silver
and filled their cellars with gold.
There the troubled are calm;
there the exhausted rest.
Rich and poor are alike there,
and the slave lies next to his master.

Why is there light for the wretched,
life for the bitter-hearted,
who long for death, who seek it
as if it were buried treasure,
who smile when they reach the graveyard
and laugh as their pit is dug.
For God has hidden my way
and put hedges across my path.
I sit and gnaw on my grief;
my groans pour out like water.
My worst fears have happened;
my nightmares have come to life.
Silence and peace have abandoned me,
and anguish camps in my heart.

The First Round

THEN ELIPHAZ THE TEMANITE SAID:

These words will perhaps upset you;
but I cannot hold back my thoughts.
Once you encouraged the timid
and filled the frightened with strength.
You brought relief to the comfortless,
gave the desperate hope.
But now it is *your* turn, you tremble;
now *you* are the victim, you shudder.

Have you lost all faith in your piety,
all hope in your perfect conduct?
Can an innocent man be punished?
Can a good man die in distress?
I have seen the plowers of evil
reaping the crimes they sowed.
One breath from God and they shrivel up;
one blast of his rage and they burn.
The lion may roar with fury,
but his teeth are cracked in his mouth.
The jackal howls and goes hungry;
the wolf is driven away.

Now a word, in secret, came to me,
a whisper crept in my ear,
at night, when visions flash
and ecstasy grips the mind.

Terror caught me; panic
 shook my bones like sticks.
 Something breathed on my face;
 my hair stood stiff.
 I could barely see—a spirit—
 hovering on my chest—
 a soft voice, speaking:
How can man be righteous?
How can mortals be pure?
If God distrusts his own servants
and charges the angels with sin,
what of those who are built of clay
and live in bodies of dust?
They are snapped like bits of straw;
their lives are blown out like candles
they vanish, and who can save them?

Call now: will anyone answer?
 To which of the angels will you turn?
 For anger destroys the fool,
 and passion flays the ignorant.
 I have seen the fool rooted up,
 his house collapsing in ruins,
 his children stripped naked
 with no one to help or pity them,
 the hungry devouring his harvest,
 the thirsty gulping his wine.
 For pain does not spring from the dust
 or sorrow sprout from the soil:
 man is the father of sorrow,
 as surely as sparks fly upward.

If I were you, I would pray;
 I would put my case before God.
 His workings are vast and fathomless,
 his wonders beyond our grasp.
 He lifts up the despised
 and leads the abandoned to safety.
 He traps the wise in their cleverness
 and ruins the plots of the cunning.
 By day they stumble in shadows;
 at noon they grope in the dark.
 But he plucks the poor from danger
 and the meek from the power of wrong.
 Then there is hope for the wretched,
 and wickedness shuts its mouth.

You are lucky that God has scolded you;
 so take his lesson to heart.
 For he wounds, but then binds up;
 he injures, but then he heals.
 When disaster strikes, he will rescue you
 and never let evil touch you.
 In war he will save you from bloodshed,
 in famine from the grip of death.
 When slander roams he will hide you;
 you will laugh in calamity's face.
 In league with the stones of the field,
 in concord with savage beasts,
 you will know that your house is protected
 and your meadows safe from harm.
 You will see your family multiply,
 your children flourish like grass.

You will die at the height of your powers
and be gathered like ripened grain.

I know that these things are true:
consider them now, and learn.

THEN JOB SAID:

If ever my grief were measured
or my sorrow put on a scale,
it would outweigh the sands of the ocean:
that is why I am desperate.
For God has ringed me with terrors,
and his arrows have pierced my heart.
When a donkey has grass, does he bray?
Does an ox low near his fodder?
Can gruel be eaten unsalted?
Is there taste in the white of an egg?
My lips refuse to touch it;
my heart is sickened at its sight.

If only my prayer were answered
and God granted my wish.
If only he made an end of me,
snipping my life like a thread.
That is my only comfort
as I writhe in this savage pain.
How long can I keep on waiting?
Why should I stay alive?
Is my body hard as a rock?
Is my flesh made of brass?
All my strength has left me;
all hope has been driven away.

My friends are streams that go dry,
 riverbeds in the desert.
 In spring they are dark with ice,
 swollen with melted snow.
 But when summer comes they are gone;
 they vanish in the blazing heat.
 Pilgrims search for them everywhere
 and lose their way in the dust.
 They wander dazed, panting;
 their tongues parch and turn black.

You too have turned against me;
 my wretchedness fills you with fear.
 Have I ever asked you to help me
 or begged you to pay my ransom,
 to rescue me from an enemy
 or save me from an oppressor?
 Teach me, and I will be silent;
 show me where I am wrong.
 Does honest speech offend you?
 Are you shocked by what I have said?
 Do you want to disprove my passion
 or argue away my despair?
 Look me straight in the eye:
 is this how a liar would face you?
 Can't I tell right from wrong?
 If I sinned, wouldn't I know it?

Man's life is a prison;
 he is sentenced to pain and grief.
 Like a slave he pants for the shadows;
 like a servant he longs for rest.
 Each day I live seems endless,
 and I suffer through endless nights.
 When I lie down, I long for morning;
 when I get up, I long for evening;
 all day I toss and turn.
 My flesh crawls with maggots;
 my skin cracks and oozes.
 My days fly past me like a shuttle,
 and my hope snaps like a thread.

Remember: life is a breath;
 soon I will vanish from your sight.
 The eye that looks will not see me;
 you may search, but I will be gone.
 Like a cloud fading in the sky,
 man dissolves into death.
 He leaves the whole world behind him
 and never comes home again.

Therefore I refuse to be quiet;
 I will cry out my bitter despair.
 Am I the Sea or the Serpent,
 that you pen me behind a wall?

If I say, "Sleep will comfort me,
 I will lie down to ease my pain,"
 then you terrify me with visions,
 your nightmares choke me with horror,
 and I wake up gasping for breath,
 longing to be dead at last.
 I will not live forever;
 leave me, for my days are wind.

What is man, that you notice him,
 turn your glare upon him,
 examine him every morning,
 test him at every instant?
 Won't you even give me
 time to swallow my spit?
 If I sinned, what have I done
 to you, Watcher of Men?
 Why have you made me your target
 and burdened me with myself?
 Can't you forgive my sins
 or overlook my mistakes?
 For soon I will lie in the dust;
 you will call, but I will be gone.

THEN BILDAD THE SHUHITE SAID:

How long will you go on ranting,
 filling our ears with trash?
 Does God make straightness crooked
 or turn truth upside down?
 Your children must have been evil:
 he punished them for their crimes.
 But if you are pure and righteous
 and pray to God for mercy,
 surely he will answer your prayer
 and fulfill your greatest desires.
 Your past will seem like a trifle,
 so blessed will your future be.

Go learn from the wisdom of the ages;
 listen to the patriarchs' words.
 For we are small and ignorant;
 our days on earth are a shadow.
 But their advice will guide you,
 and their answers will give you peace.

Can papyrus grow without water?
 Can a reed flourish in sand?
 As crisp and fresh as it looked,
 it wilts like a blade of grass.
 Such is the fate of the impious,
 the empty hope of the sinner.

His peace of mind is gossamer;
 his faith is a spider's web.
 Though he props up his house, it collapses;
 though he builds it again, it falls.

But the righteous blossom in sunlight,
 and the garden is filled with their seeds.
 Their roots twine around stones
 and fasten even to rocks.
 If they are plucked from the ground,
 rooted up from their soil,
 they rejoice wherever they go
 and bloom again from the dust.

God never betrays the innocent
 or takes the hand of the wicked.
 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,
 and joy will burst from your lips.
 Your enemies will drown in their shame,
 and the wind will blow through their houses.

THEN JOB SAID:

I know that this is true:
 no man can argue with God
 or answer even one
 of a thousand accusations.
 However wise or powerful—
 who could oppose him and live?
 He levels cliffs in an instant,
 rooting them up in his rage;
 he knocks the earth from its platform
 and shakes the pillars of the sky;
 he talks to the sun—it darkens;
 he clamps a seal on the stars.
 He alone stretched out the heavens
 and trampled the heights of the sea;
 he made the Bear and the Hunter,
 the Scorpion, the Twins.
 His workings are vast and fathomless,
 his wonders beyond my grasp.
 If he passed me, I would not see him;
 if he went by, I would not know.
 If he seized me, who could stop him
 or cry out, "What are you doing?"
 He will never hold back his fury;
 the Dragon lies at his feet.

How then can I refute him
 or marshal my words against him?
 How can I prove my innocence?
 Do I have to beg him for mercy?
 If I testify, will he answer?
 Is he listening to my plea?
 He has punished me for a trifle;
 for no reason he gashes my flesh.
 He makes me gasp with terror;
 he plunges me into despair.
 For in strength, he is far beyond me;
 and in eloquence, who is like him?
 I am guiltless, but his mouth condemns me;
 blameless, but his words convict me.
 He does not care; so I say
 he murders both the pure and the wicked.
 When the plague brings sudden death,
 he laughs at the anguish of the innocent.
 He hands the earth to the wicked
 and blindfolds its judges' eyes.
 Who does it, if not he?

My days sprint past me like runners;
 I will never see them again.
 They glide by me like sailboats;
 they swoop down like hawks on their prey.
 If I want to forget my misery
 or try to smile at my pain,
 one thought makes me shudder:
 that you don't believe what I say.

If I am already guilty,
 why should I struggle on?
 Should I wash my body in snow,
 scour my face with sand?
 You would toss me into a cesspool,
 and my own stench would make me vomit.
 If only there were an arbiter
 who could lay his hand on us both,
 who could make you put down your club
 and hold back your terrible arm.
 Then, without fear, I would say,
 You have not treated me justly.

I loathe each day of my life;
 I will take my complaint to God.
 I will say, Do not condemn me;
 why are you so enraged?
 Is it right for you to be vicious,
 to spoil what your own hands made?
 Are your eyes mere eyes of flesh?
 Is your vision no keener than a man's?
 Is your mind like a human mind?
 Are your feelings human feelings?
 For you keep pursuing a sin,
 trying to dig up a crime,
 though you *know* that I am innocent
 and cannot escape from your grip.

Your hands molded and made me,
 and someday you will destroy me.

Remember: you formed me from clay
 and will soon turn me back to dust.
 You poured me out like milk,
 made me curdle like cheese,
 clothed me in flesh and skin,
 knit me with bones and sinews.
 You loved me, you gave me life,
 you nursed and cared for my spirit.
 Yet this you hid in your heart,
 this I know was your purpose:
 to watch me, and if ever I sinned
 to punish me for the rest of my days.
 You lash me if I am guilty,
 shame me if I am not.
 You set me free, then trap me,
 like a cat toying with a mouse.

Why did you let me be born?
 Why couldn't I have stayed
 in the deep waters of the womb,
 rocked to sleep in the dark?
 Is my life not wretched enough?
 Leave me one moment of peace,
 before I must go away
 to the land of endless shadows,
 the land of gloom and sighing,
 where dawn is as black as night.

THEN ZOPHAR THE NAMATHITE SAID:

Should this man be saved by his words,
 acquitted because he speaks well?
 Should you mouth us into submission
 and go on with your impudent lies?
 You say, "My conscience is clear";
 you think that your life is spotless.
 But if God were to cross-examine you
 and turned up your hidden motives
 and presented his case against you
 and told you why he has punished you—
 you would know that your guilt is great.

How can you understand God
 or fathom his endless wisdom?
 It is higher than heaven—can you reach it?,
 deeper than hell—can you touch it?,
 wider than all the earth,
 broader than the breadth of the sea.
 If he seizes and casts in prison
 and condemns—who can stop him?
 For he knows that you are a sinner;
 he sees and judges your crimes.
 But a stupid man will be wise
 when a cow gives birth to a zebra.

Come now, repent of your sins;
 open your heart to God.
 Wash your hands of their wickedness;
 banish crime from your door.
 Then your soul will be pure;
 your heart will be firm and fearless.
 All your suffering will vanish,
 flowing away like a stream.
 Your life will shine like the sun;
 your darkest day will be bright.
 Your faith will be unshakable;
 your mind will be strong and serene.
 No one will dare to disturb you;
 many will seek your favor.
 But the wicked will all be punished;
 they will live in constant terror;
 their hope will become a noose.

THEN JOB SAID:

You, it seems, know everything;
 perfect wisdom is yours.
 But I am not an idiot:
 who does not know such things?
 Even the animals will tell you,
 and the birds in the sky will teach you.
 Any plant will instruct you;
 go learn from the fish in the sea.
 Which of them does not know
 that God created all things?
 In his hand is the soul of all beings
 and the spirit of every man.

Doesn't the mind understand
 as simply as the tongue tastes?
 Do all men grow in knowledge?
 Are they wise because they are old?
 Only God is wise;
 knowledge is his alone.
 He tears down—no man can build;
 he imprisons—no man can free.
 He holds back the rain—there is drought;
 he pours it—it floods the earth.
 Power belongs to him only;
 deceived and deceiver are his.
 He turns great lords into morons,
 priests into driveling fools.

He pushes kings off their thrones
 and knocks the crown from their heads.
 He strips the wise of their reason
 and makes the eloquent mute.
 He pours contempt on princes
 and crushes the high and haughty.
 He puffs up nations and wrecks them,
 blotting them out in their pride.
 He drives great rulers insane
 and drops them alone in the wilderness.
 They grope about in the dark,
 staggering as if they were drunk.

All this I have seen with my own eyes;
 my own ears have heard these things.
 What you know, I know also;
 my mind is as clear as yours.
 But I want to speak before God,
 to present my case in God's court.
 For *you* smear my wounds with ignorance
 and patch my body with lies.
 Don't you have any sense?
 Will you never shut your mouths?

Listen now to my arguments;
 hear out my accusations.
 Will you lie to vindicate God?
 Will you perjure yourselves for him?
 Will you blindly stand on his side,
 pleading his case alone?

What will you do when he questions you?
 Can you cheat him as you would a man?
 Won't he judge you severely
 if your testimony is false?
 Won't he crush you with terror
 and chill your bones with fear?
 Your answers are dusty answers;
 your words crumble like clay.

Be quiet now—let *me* speak;
 whatever happens will happen.
 I will take my flesh in my teeth,
 hold my life in my hands.
 He may kill me, but I won't stop;
 I will speak the truth, to his face.
 Listen now to my words;
 pay attention to what I say.
 For I have prepared my defense,
 and I know that I am right.

Grant me one thing only,
 and I will not hide from your face:
 do not numb me with fear
 or flood my heart with your terror.
 Accuse me—I will respond;
 or let me speak, and answer me.
 What crime have I committed?
 How have I sinned against you?
 Why do you hide your face
 as if I were your enemy?

Will you frighten a withered leaf
 or hunt down a piece of straw?
 For you count up all my errors
 and convict me for the sins of my youth.
 You put my legs in shackles;
 you brand the soles of my feet;
 you follow my every step.

Man who is born of woman—
 how few and harsh are his days!
 Like a flower he blooms and withers;
 like a shadow he fades in the dark.
 He falls apart like a wine-skin,
 like a garment chewed by moths.
 And must *you* take notice of *him*?
 Must *you* call *him* to account?
 Since all his days are determined
 and the sum of his years is set—
 look away; leave him alone;
 grant him peace, for one moment.

Even if it is cut down,
 a tree can return to life.
 Though its roots decay in the ground
 and its stump grows old and rotten,
 it will bud at the scent of water
 and bloom as if it were young.
 But man is cut down forever;
 he dies, and where is he then?

The lake is drained of its water,
 the river becomes a ditch,
 and man will not rise again
 while the sky is above the earth.

If only you would hide me in the pit
 till your anger has passed away,
 then come to me and release me.
 All my days in prison
 I would sit and wait for that time.
 You would call me—I would answer;
 you would come to me and rejoice,
 delighting in my smallest step
 like a father watching his child.

But cliffs fall to the ground;
 boulders crumble away;
 mountains are turned to dust;
 and you destroy man's hope.
 You crush him into the ground,
 send him away disfigured.
 If his sons are honored, does he know?
 If his daughters are shamed, does he care?
 Only his own flesh hurts him,
 and he mourns for himself alone.

The Second Round

THEN ELIPHAZ THE TEMANITE SAID:

Does a wise man spout such nonsense
and fill his belly with gas?
Does he blurt out useless arguments,
words that can do no good?
You are undermining religion
and crippling faith in God.
Sin has seduced your mind;
your tongue flaps with deceit.
Your mouth condemns you, not I;
your own lips testify against you.

Are you the first man to be born,
created before the mountains?
Have you listened in at God's keyhole
and crept away with his plans?
What do you know that *we* don't?
What have you seen that we haven't?
We are old; our beards are white;
we speak with the wisdom of age.
Will you scorn religion's comforts
and reject our indulgent advice?
What has taken hold of you?
What has made you so wild
that you spew your anger at God
and spit out such insolent words?

What is man—is he pure?

Can a son of woman be sinless?

If God mistrusts his angels

and heaven stinks in his nose,

what of that vermin, man,

who laps up filth like water?

Listen now to my words;

I will tell you what I have seen—

what the sages too have said

and the wise have never kept hidden:

The wicked man's life is a torment;

his days are anguish and pain.

In his ear is the voice of terror;

in his mouth is the taste of death.

He flees from darkness to darkness;

he is marked for the edge of the sword.

His body is food for vultures;

disaster nibbles his flesh.

Anguish pounds at his mind;

fear and panic assault him,

like a soldier before a battle.

For he shook his fist at God

and dared to revolt against him,

charging at him headlong

behind the spikes of his shield.

Though his face was plump and cheerful

and his thighs bulged with health,

he lives in a desolate city

and sleeps in an empty room.

All his works have decayed;

his roots have rotted in the ground.

The sun withered his shoots;

his blossoms fell in the wind.

His leaves shriveled and died;

all his branches are bare.

He was stripped of his grapes like a vine

and dropped his buds like an olive tree.

For the fate of the wicked is barren,

and his hopes are consumed by fire.

His womb is heavy with suffering;

he gives birth to sorrow and pain.

THEN JOB SAID:

Enough—I have heard enough!
 I am sick of your consolations!
 How long will you pelt me with insults?
 Will your malice never relent?
 I too could say such things
 if you were in my position:
 I could bury you with accusations
 and sneer at you in my piety;
 or whisper my easy comfort
 and encourage you with a word.

But I speak, and my pain keeps raging;
 I am silent, and have no relief.
 For disaster has worn me out,
 and suffering has made me wither.
 In his rage he hunted and caught me;
 he cracked my bones in his teeth.
 I was whole—he ripped me apart,
 chewed my body to pulp.
 He set me up as a target;
 his arrows tore through my flesh.
 He hacked my liver to pieces;
 he poured my gall on the ground.
 He besieged me like a fortress;
 he demolished my inmost walls.

I have wrapped my skin in sackcloth
 and laid my head in the dust.
 My face is swollen from weeping;
 shadows circle my eyes—
 although my hands are spotless
 and the prayer of my heart is pure.

O Earth, do not cover my blood!
 Never let my cry be buried!
 For I have a witness in heaven,
 a spokesman above the clouds.
 May he judge between mortal and God
 as he would between man and neighbor.
 For grief has darkened my eyes;
 my body is like a shadow.
 My days fade like an echo;
 the strings of my heart have snapped.
 And soon my life will vanish;
 I will walk down into the dust.

I have taken the pit as my home
 and made my bed in the dark.
 I have called the grave my father;
 the worm my mother, my sister.
 And where now is my hope?
 My piety—who will see it?
 It will follow me to the grave
 and lie in the dust beside me.

THEN BILDAD THE SHUHITE SAID:

How long will you lay these word-snares?
Be sensible: then we will talk.
Why do you treat us like morons
and act as if we were cows?
Should the earth be changed for *your* sake
and mountains move at your bidding?

It is true: the sinner is snuffed out;
his candle flickers and dies.
His arrogant steps are hobbled;
he is tripped by his own deceit.
A net catches his legs;
he stumbles into a pit.
His heels stick in a trap;
a noose snaps his neck.
The terrors of death surround him
and make him piss in his pants.
Misfortune hungers after him;
disaster waits at his side.
Sickness gnaws his flesh;
death picks his bones.
Fire guts his house;
sulphur rains on his fields.
All his roots are withered;
all his branches are bare.

He disappears from the earth;
not a trace is left behind him.
He is thrown into endless darkness
and locked out of the world.
At his fate the East is appalled,
and terror grips the West.

This is what happens to the godless;
this is the sinner's doom.

THEN JOB SAID:

How long will you make me suffer
and crush my heart with your words?
Again and again you mock me
and wrong me with shameless lies.
Do you think I have lost my mind?
Am I the one who is raving?
Are you sure that you have convicted me
and justified my disgrace?

No—because God has tricked me,
and lured me into his trap.
I call, but there is no answer;
I cry out, and where is justice?
He made my road impassable,
covered my path with darkness,
stripped me of my honor,
knocked the crown from my head.
He broke me, rooted me up,
left me in little pieces.
His anger set me on fire;
his hatred burned me to ashes.

All my friends have forgotten me;
my neighbors have thrown me away.
My relatives look through me
as though I didn't exist.

My servants refuse to hear me;
they shun me like a leper.
My breath sickens my wife;
my stench disgusts my brothers.
Even young children fear me;
when they see me, they run away.
My dearest friends despise me;
I have lost everyone I love.
Have pity on me, my friends,
for God's fist has struck me.
Why must you hunt me as God does?
Why do you gnaw my flesh?

If only my cry were recorded
and my plea inscribed on a tablet—
carved with an iron stylus,
chiseled in rock forever.
Someday my witness would come;
my avenger would read those words.
He would plead for me in God's court;
he would stand up and vindicate my name.

THEN ZOPHAR THE NAMATHITE SAID:

My mind is seething with anger,
and rage drives me to speak.
I have heard enough of your insults;
you answer our wisdom with lies.

Haven't you realized yet
(How can you be so blind!)
that the sinner's joy is brief
and lasts no more than a moment?
Though he rises as high as heaven
and his forehead touches the clouds,
he will drop to the ground like dung
and rot like a fallen fruit.
He flies away like a vision,
vanishes like a dream.
His friends do not give him a thought;
his children forget his name.
His body may pulse with vigor,
but soon he will lie in the dust.

Though crime was sweet on his lips
and evil melted in his mouth,
though he tried to keep its flavor
and hold its taste on his tongue,
the food that he swallowed turns
to poison inside his belly.

He chews the head of a viper,
sucks the tongue of a snake.
He loses his vats of oil;
his cream and honey are spilled.
He is forced to spit up his riches
and vomit out all his wealth.

For he crushed the weak and the helpless;
he pushed the poor from their huts.
His hunger gave him no rest;
he was driven by his desire;
nothing escaped his greed:
therefore his wealth will vanish.
At the height of his fortune he falls;
every disaster strikes him.
The wrath of God assaults him;
calamities rain on his head.
Total darkness engulfs him;
fire from heaven consumes him.
Storms demolish his fields;
floods sweep away his house.
Heaven reveals his guilt,
and earth rises against him.

This is the fate of the sinner;
this is the rebel's reward.

THEN JOB SAID:

Listen now to my words;
 let that be the comfort you give me.
 Bear with me: let me speak;
 when I finish, then you can laugh.
 Is my grievance against a man?
 Why shouldn't I be impatient?
 Look at me: be appalled;
 clap your hands to your mouths.
 When I think of it I am terrified
 and horror chills my flesh.

Why do the wicked prosper
 and live to a ripe old age?
 Their children stand beside them;
 their grandchildren sit on their laps.
 Their houses are safe from danger,
 secure from the wrath of God.
 Not one of their bulls is impotent;
 not one of their cows miscarries.
 Their grandchildren run out to play,
 skipping about like lambs,
 singing to drum and lyre,
 dancing to the sound of the flute.
 They end their lives in prosperity
 and go to the grave in peace.

Yet they tell God, "Leave us alone;
 we can't be bothered about you.
 Why should we pray to God?
 What good will it do us to serve you?"

Is the lamp of the sinner snuffed out?
 Does misfortune knock on his door?
 Is he really driven like chaff,
 blown like straw in the wind?
 Is calamity saved for his children?
 Let him have his punishment *now*!
 Let his own eyes see disaster!
 Let him choke on the wrath of God!
 For what does he care about others
 when his own life comes to an end?

One man dies serenely,
 lapped in safety and comfort,
 his thighs bulging with fat,
 the marrow moist in his bones.
 Another dies in despair,
 his life bitter on his tongue.
 But both men rot in the ground,
 and maggots chew on them both.

I know what you are thinking,
 the lies you have slapped together.
 You say, "But where is the rich man?
 Show us the homes of the wicked!"

Haven't you talked with travelers?

Don't you know from their tales
that the sinner escapes destruction
and is spared on the day of wrath?

No one condemns his sins
or punishes him for his crimes.

He is carried with pomp to the graveyard;
thousands weep by his coffin.

He is tucked into the earth,
and flowers bloom on his grave.

How hollow then is your comfort!
Your answers are empty lies.

The Third Round

THEN ELIPHAZ THE TEMANITE SAID:

What use can man be to God—
even the wisest of men?
Does God profit from your goodness
or gain by your perfect conduct?
Would he sentence you for your piety
or punish you for your faith?

Your guilt must be great indeed;
your crimes must be inconceivable.
You cheated your dearest friends,
stripped your debtors naked,
stole food from the hungry,
let the destitute starve,
spat on widow and orphan,
laughed in the beggar's face.
That is why pain surrounds you
and sudden terror has struck you.
Light is turned to darkness,
and the waves close over your head.

Since God is far up in heaven,
higher than the highest stars,
you thought, "What does *he* know?
Can he see through the thicket of clouds?
How can he judge my actions,
as he walks on the rim of the sky?"

Why do you keep on sinning,
 as the wicked have always done?
 They were cut off before their time;
 they were swept away in a flood.
 For they told God, "Leave us alone;
 don't meddle in our affairs."
 The righteous saw and were happy;
 the innocent laughed at their fall.
 Everything they had was destroyed,
 and all their riches vanished.

Come now: make peace with God;
 make peace: you will not be sorry.
 Listen to his instructions;
 keep his words in your heart.
 If you humble yourself before him
 and banish sin from your house,
 treating your gold like dust,
 your silver like worthless pebbles,
 then God will become your treasure,
 more precious than the finest gold.
 For then you will trust in God
 and look to heaven for help.
 You will pray, and he will hear you;
 he will grant whatever you wish.
 Everything you do will succeed,
 and light will shine on your path.
 For he does not abandon the innocent;
 if you are pure, he will save you.

THEN JOB SAID:

Still my condition is desperate;
 his fist still beats on my skull.
 If only I knew where to meet him
 and could find my way to his court.
 I would argue my case before him;
 words would flow from my mouth.
 I would counter all his arguments
 and disprove his accusations.
 Would he try to overpower me
 or refuse to hear my defense?
 Surely he would listen to reason;
 I would surely win my case.
 For he knows that I am innocent;
 if he sifts me I will shine like gold.
 My feet have walked on his way
 and never strayed from his path.
 I have kept all his commandments,
 treasuring his words in my heart.

But he wills, and who can stop him?
 What he wishes to do, he does.
 He will go ahead with his plans,
 devising my endless torment.
 That is why terror grips me;
 when I think of it, I am appalled.

He has wrung the strength from my mind
 and pumped my heart full with sorrow.
 Yet I am not silenced by darkness
 or the night that covers my face.

Where are the days of judgment,
 the times when the wicked are tried?
 They steal land from their neighbors
 and walk away with their flocks.
 They drive off the orphan's donkey,
 impound the widow's bull.
 They push the weak from the pathway
 and force the wretched to hide.

The poor, like herds of cattle,
 wander across the plains,
 searching all day for food,
 picking up scraps for their children.
 Naked, without a refuge,
 they shiver in the bitter cold.
 When it rains, they are drenched to the bone;
 they huddle together in caves.
 They carry grain for the wicked
 and break their backs for the rich.
 They press olives and starve,
 crush grapes and go thirsty.

In the city the dying groan
 and the wounded cry out for help;
 but God sees nothing wrong.

At twilight the killer appears,
 stalking his helpless victim.
 The rapist waits for evening
 and roams through the darkened streets.
 The thief crawls from the shadows
 with a hood pulled over his face.
 They shut themselves in by day
 and hate the sight of the sun.
 Midnight to them is morning;
 they thrive in the terrors of night.

THEN BILDAD THE SHUHITE SAID:

How can a man be pure
or a son of woman be sinless?
If God despises the moon
and thinks that the stars are tainted,
what about man, that worm,
that vile, stinking maggot?

Power belongs to God,
who makes peace in heaven.
Can his vast battalions be numbered?
Who can escape his onslaught?
The dead tremble beneath him;
demons shudder at his name.
The pit is naked before him;
below him the grave gapes wide.
He stretched the sky over chaos;
he hung the earth in the void.
He wrapped the waters in rainclouds,
and they did not burst from the weight.
He set the horizon there,
at the boundary of light and darkness.
The pillars of heaven trembled;
the mountains shook at his rage.
With his power he bound the Sea;
with his cunning he crushed the Dragon.

He shattered the Ocean with his breath
and pierced the primeval Serpent.

These are the least of his works:
we hear no more than a whisper;
for who knows his thunderous might?

THEN JOB SAID:

How kind you all have been to me!
How considerate of my pain!
What would I do without you
and the good advice you have given?
Who has made you so tactful
and inspired such compassionate words?

I swear by God, who has wronged me
and filled my cup with despair,
that while there is life in this body
and as long as I can breathe,
I will never let you convict me;
I will never give up my claim.
I will hold tight to my innocence;
my mind will never submit.

THEN ZOPHAR THE NAMATHITE SAID:

What can the sinner hope for
when God demands his life?
Is he able to trust in God
and cry out to him at that moment?
Will God be moved by his screaming
as death takes him by the throat?

This is the sinner's fate,
the violent man's reward:
Famine devours his daughters;
his sons are murdered by thieves.
He may heap up silver like dirt,
pile up the finest linen,
but the righteous inherit his wealth
and the innocent share his possessions.
His house is frail as a bird's nest,
weak as a watchman's hut.
He goes to sleep a rich man;
when he wakes up, his room is bare.
Waves of terror flood over him;
panic sweeps him away.
The east wind flings itself on him,
whirls him out of his bed,
claps its hands around him
and whistles him off in the dark.

The Summation

THEN JOB SAID:

If only I could return
to the days when God was my guardian;
when his fire blazed above me
and guided me through the dark—
to the days when I was in blossom
and God was a hedge around me;
when he hadn't yet deserted me
and my children sat at my side;
when my feet were bathed in cream
and oil gushed from the rock.

As I walked to the square of the city
and took my seat of honor,
young men held their breath;
old men rose to their feet;
rich men stopped speaking
and put their fingers to their lips;
men of authority shuddered,
and their tongues stuck in their throats.

They listened to me in silence;
they clung to each of my words.
When I finished, they could not speak,
for my wisdom had showered upon them.
They thirsted for my speech like rain
and drank it as if they were dust.

My smile gave them courage;
 my radiant face inspired them.
 I sat before them in majesty,
 like a king at the head of his troops.

All ears were filled with my praise;
 every eye was my witness.
 For I rescued the poor, the desperate,
 those who had nowhere to turn.
 I brought relief to the beggar
 and joy to the widow's heart.
 Righteousness was my clothing,
 justice my robe and turban.
 I served as eyes for the blind,
 hands and feet for the crippled.
 To the destitute I was a father;
 I fought for the stranger's rights.
 I broke the jaws of the wicked,
 plucked the spoil from their teeth.
 And I thought, "I will live many years,
 growing as old as the palm tree.
 My roots will be spread for water,
 and the dew will rest on my boughs."

And now I am jeered at by streetboys,
 whose fathers I would have considered
 unfit to take care of my dogs.
 What were *they* but mongrels?
 No one would have called them men.

Shriveled up with hunger,
 they gnawed the desolate wasteland.
 They picked leaves for their supper,
 fed on branches and roots.
 They were driven out from the cities,
 shouted after like thieves,
 to live out their days in the wilderness,
 in caverns or under rocks.
 They grunted together in the bushes
 and copulated in the dust—
 these misbegotten wretches,
 these outcasts from the land of men.

And now I am their fool;
 they snigger behind my back.
 They stand beside me and sneer;
 they walk up and spit in my face.
 When they see me, frenzy takes them;
 they turn into savage beasts.
 They rush at me in a mob;
 they raise siege-ramps against me.
 They tear down my defenses;
 they swarm over my wall.
 They burst in at the breach
 and come pouring through like a flood.
 Terror rises before me;
 my courage is blown like the wind;
 like a cloud my hope is gone.

And now I am in agony;
 the days of sorrow have caught me.
 Pain pierces my skin;
 suffering gnaws my bones.
 Despair grips me by the neck,
 shakes me by the collar of my coat.
 You show me that I am clay
 and make certain that I am dust.
 I cry out, and you do not answer;
 I am silent, and you do not care.
 You look down at me with hatred
 and lash me with all your might.
 You toss me around in storm clouds,
 straddle me on the wind.
 And I know that you will destroy me
 and lock me in the house of the dead.

 Did I ever strike down a beggar
 when he called to me in distress?
 Didn't I weep for the wretched?
 Didn't I grieve for the poor?
 Yet instead of good came evil,
 and instead of light there was darkness.

 My innards boil and clamor;
 the days of suffering have caught me.
 I despair and can find no comfort;
 I stand up and cry for help.
 I am brother to the wild jackal,
 friend to the desert owl.

My flesh blackens and peels;
 all my bones are on fire.
 And my harp is tuned to mourning,
 my flute to the sound of tears.

 I made a pact with my eyes,
 that I would not gaze at evil.
 But what good has virtue done me?
 How has God rewarded me?
 Isn't disgrace for sinners
 and misery for the wicked?
 Can't he tell right from wrong
 or keep his accounts in order?

 If I ever held hands with malice
 or my feet hurried to crime
 (I will *prove* that I am innocent!
 I will make him see with his eyes!)—
 if my legs strayed from the path
 or my heart followed my glance
 or a stain clung to my palms—
 let strangers eat what I sowed
 and tear out my crop by the roots!

 If my loins were seduced by a woman
 and I loitered at my neighbor's door—
 let any man take my wife
 and grind in between her thighs!

If I scorned the rights of my servant
 or closed my ears to his plea—
 what would I do if God appeared?
 If he questioned me, what could I answer?
 Didn't the same God make us
 and form us both in the womb?

If I ever neglected the poor
 or made the innocent suffer;
 if I ate my meals alone
 and did not share with the hungry;
 if I did not clothe the naked
 or care for the ragged beggar;
 if his body did not bless me
 for the warmth of my sheep's wool;
 if I ever abused the helpless,
 knowing that I could not be punished—
 let my arm fall from my shoulder
 and my elbow be ripped from its socket!

If my land cried out against me;
 if its furrows saw me and wept;
 if I took its fruits without paying
 or caused its tenants to sigh—
 let thorns grow instead of wheat
 and thistles instead of barley!

If I ever trusted in silver
 or pledged allegiance to gold;

if I ever boasted of my riches
 or took any credit for my wealth;
 if I saw the sun in its splendor
 or the bright moon moving
 and my heart was ever seduced
 and I kissed my hand in worship;
 if I laughed when my enemy fell
 or rejoiced when suffering found him
 or allowed my tongue to sin
 by binding him in a curse;
 if my servants ever spoke
 an unkind word to a guest
 (for I never shut out a stranger
 or turned a traveler away);
 if I ever covered my crimes
 or buried my sins in my heart,
 afraid of what people thought,
 shivering behind my doors . . .

Oh if only God would hear me,
 state his case against me,
 let me read his indictment.
 I would carry it on my shoulder
 or wear it on my head like a crown.
 I would justify the least of my actions;
 I would stand before him like a prince.

**The Voice from
the Whirlwind**

THEN THE UNNAMABLE ANSWERED JOB
FROM WITHIN THE WHIRLWIND:

Who is this whose ignorant words
smear my design with darkness?
Stand up now like a man;
I will question you: please, instruct me.

Where were you when I planned the earth?
Tell me, if you are so wise.
Do you know who took its dimensions,
measuring its length with a cord?
What were its pillars built on?
Who laid down its cornerstone,
while the morning stars burst out singing
and the angels shouted for joy!

Were you there when I stopped the waters,
as they issued gushing from the womb?
when I wrapped the ocean in clouds
and swaddled the sea in shadows?
when I closed it in with barriers
and set its boundaries, saying,
"Here you may come, but no farther;
here shall your proud waves break."

Have you ever commanded morning
or guided dawn to its place—

to hold the corners of the sky
and shake off the last few stars?
All things are touched with color;
the whole world is changed.

Have you walked through the depths of the ocean
or dived to the floor of the sea?
Have you stood at the gates of doom
or looked through the gates of death?
Have you seen to the edge of the universe?
Speak up, if you have such knowledge.

Where is the road to light?
Where does darkness live?
(Perhaps you will guide them home
or show them the way to their house.)
You know, since you have been there
and are older than all creation.

Have you seen where the snow is stored
or visited the storehouse of hail,
which I keep for the day of terror,
the final hours of the world?
Where is the west wind released
and the east wind sent down to earth?

Who cuts a path for the thunderstorm
and carves a road for the rain—
to water the desolate wasteland,
the land where no man lives;

to make the wilderness blossom
and cover the desert with grass?

Does the rain have a father?
Who has begotten the dew?
Out of whose belly is the ice born?
Whose womb labors with the sleet?
(The water's surface stiffens;
the lake grows hard as rock.)

Can you tie the Twins together
or loosen the Hunter's cords?
Can you light the Evening Star
or lead out the Bear and her cubs?
Do you know all the patterns of heaven
and how they affect the earth?

If you shout commands to the thunderclouds,
will they rush off to do your bidding?
If you clap for the bolts of lightning,
will they come and say "Here we are"?
Who gathers up the stormclouds,
slits them and pours them out,
turning dust to mud
and soaking the cracked clay?

Do you hunt game for the lioness
and feed her ravenous cubs,
when they crouch in their den, impatient,
or lie in ambush in the thicket?

Who finds her prey at nightfall,
when her cubs are aching with hunger?

Do you tell the antelope to calve
or ease her when she is in labor?
Do you count the months of her fullness
and know when her time has come?
She kneels; she tightens her womb;
she pants, she presses, gives birth.
Her little ones grow up;
they leave and never return.

Who unties the wild ass
and lets him wander at will?
He ranges the open prairie
and roams across the saltlands.
He is far from the tumult of cities;
he laughs at the driver's whip.
He scours the hills for food,
in search of anything green.

Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will he spend the night in your stable?
Can you tie a rope to his neck?
Will he harrow the fields behind you?
Will you trust him because he is powerful
and leave him to do your work?
Will you wait for him to come back,
bringing your grain to the barn?

Do you deck the ostrich with wings,
with elegant plumes and feathers?
She lays her eggs in the dirt
and lets them hatch on the ground,
forgetting that a foot may crush them
or sharp teeth crack them open.
She treats her children cruelly,
as if they were not her own.
For God deprived her of wisdom
and left her with little sense.
When she spreads her wings to run,
she laughs at the horse and rider.

Do you give the horse his strength?
Do you clothe his neck with terror?
Do you make him leap like a locust,
snort like a blast of thunder?
He paws and champs at the bit;
he exults as he charges into battle.
He laughs at the sight of danger;
he does not wince from the sword
or the arrows nipping at his ears
or the flash of spear and javelin.
With his hooves he swallows the ground;
he quivers at the sound of the trumpet.
When the trumpet calls, he says "Ah!"
From far off he smells the battle,
the thunder of the captains and the shouting.

Do you show the hawk how to fly,
 stretching his wings on the wind?
 Do you teach the vulture to soar
 and build his nest in the clouds?
 He makes his home on the mountaintop,
 on the unapproachable crag.
 He sits and scans for prey;
 from far off his eyes can spot it;
 his little ones drink its blood.
 Where the unburied are, he is.

THEN THE UNNAMABLE ASKED JOB:

Has God's accuser resigned?
 Has my critic swallowed his tongue?

JOB SAID TO THE UNNAMABLE:

I am speechless: what can I answer?
 I put my hand on my mouth.
 I have said too much already;
 now I will speak no more.

THEN THE UNNAMABLE AGAIN SPOKE TO JOB
 FROM WITHIN THE WHIRLWIND:

Do you dare to deny my judgment?
 Am I wrong because you are right?

Is your arm like the arm of God?
 Can your voice bellow like mine?
 Dress yourself like an emperor.
 Climb up onto your throne.
 Unleash your savage justice.
 Cut down the rich and the mighty.
 Make the proud man grovel.
 Pluck the wicked from their perch.
 Push them into the grave.
 Throw them, screaming, to hell.
 Then I will admit
 that your own strength can save you.

Look now: the Beast that I made:
 he eats grass like a bull.
 Look: the power in his thighs,
 the pulsing sinews of his belly.
 His penis stiffens like a pine;
 his testicles bulge with vigor.
 His ribs are bars of bronze,
 his bones iron beams.
 He is first of the works of God,
 created to be my plaything.
 He lies under the lotus,
 hidden by reeds and shadows.
 He is calm though the river rages,
 though the torrent beats against his mouth.
 Who then will take him by the eyes
 or pierce his nose with a peg?

Will you catch the Serpent with a fishhook
 or tie his tongue with a thread?
 Will you pass a string through his nose
 or crack his jaw with a pin?
 Will he plead with you for mercy
 and timidly beg your pardon?
 Will he come to terms of surrender
 and promise to be your slave?
 Will you play with him like a sparrow
 and put him on a leash for your girls?
 Will merchants bid for his carcass
 and parcel him out to shops?
 Will you riddle his skin with spears,
 split his head with harpoons?
 Go ahead: attack him:
 you will never try it again.

Look: hope is a lie:
 you would faint at the very sight of him.
 Who would dare to arouse him?
 Who would stand in his way?
 Who under all the heavens
 could fight against him and live?
 Who could pierce his armor
 or shatter his coat of mail?
 Who could pry open his jaws,
 with their horrible arched teeth?
 He sneezes and lightnings flash;
 his eyes glow like dawn.

Smoke pours from his nostrils
 like steam from a boiling pot.
 His breath sets coals ablaze;
 flames leap from his mouth.
 Power beats in his neck,
 and terror dances before him.
 His skin is hard as a rock,
 his heart huge as a boulder.
 No sword can stick in his flesh;
 javelins shatter against him.
 He cracks iron like straw,
 bronze like rotten wood.
 No arrow can pierce his skin;
 slingstones hit him and crumble.
 He chews clubs to splinters
 and laughs at the quivering spear.
 His belly is thick with spikes;
 he drags the swamp like a rake.
 When he rises the waves fall back
 and the breakers tremble before him.
 He makes the ocean boil,
 lashes the sea to a froth.
 His wake glistens behind him;
 the waters are white with foam.
 No one on earth is his equal—
 a creature without fear.
 He looks down on the highest.
 He is king over all the proud beasts.

THEN JOB SAID TO THE UNNAMABLE:

I know you can do all things
and nothing you wish is impossible.

*Who is this whose ignorant words
cover my design with darkness?*

I have spoken of the unspeakable
and tried to grasp the infinite.

Listen and I will speak;

I will question you: please, instruct me.

I had heard of you with my ears;
but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I will be quiet,
comforted that I am dust.

EPILOGUE:

The Legend

After he had spoken to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am very angry at you and your two friends, because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. So take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer a sacrifice for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and for his sake I will overlook your sin. For you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Namathite went and did what the Lord had commanded. And the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

Then the Lord returned all Job's possessions, and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his relatives and everyone who had known him came to his house to celebrate. They commiserated with him over all the suffering that the Lord had inflicted on him. As they left, each one gave him a coin or a gold ring.

So the Lord blessed the end of Job's life more than the beginning. Job now had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters: the eldest he named Dove, the second Cinnamon, and the third Eye-shadow. And in all the world there were no women as beautiful as Job's daughters. He gave them a share of his possessions along with their brothers.

After this, Job lived for a hundred and forty years. He lived to see his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren. And he died at a very great age.

A Note on the Text

Job probably dates from the seventh to fifth centuries before the common era. But the earliest Hebrew manuscript that survives was written some fifteen hundred years later. Through many centuries of oral and scribal transmission, corruptions are bound to occur even in the simplest text; and *Job*, because of its strange idiom and the extreme compression of its verse, must have seemed difficult even to the poet's contemporaries. Difficult, and scandalous. In several places, it is obvious that some scribe has deliberately altered a word, out of a pious desire to suppress *Job's* blasphemy. And there are numerous other errors that must be due to inadvertence or misunderstanding.

However these corruptions came into being, they are there, in plain view, and the translator can make only the most tenuous sense out of many verses, unless he emends them. Some emendations may require revision of every word in a line; but most are relatively simple, requiring the change of a letter or two. For example, in chapter 5, verses 6-7 in the traditional (Massoretic) text can be rendered:

For pain does not spring from the dust
or sorrow sprout from the soil:
man is born to sorrow
as surely as sparks fly upward.

Not only is the second verse a weak antithesis; it contradicts Eliphaz's entire argument that misfortune is *not* the common lot of man, as *Job* thinks, and is not part of the natural order, but is rather the direct result of an individual's wickedness or folly. Now the original written Hebrew consisted entirely of consonants; the vowel-points were added during the seventh century C.E. by rabbinic scholars called the Massoretes, follow-

ing the then current tradition of pronunciation. A change in vowel-points here (*yulad* to *yolid*) yields a verse that fits well in the context:

man gives birth to sorrow
as surely as sparks fly upward.

Some emendations carry with them the authority of the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation, which dates from the second century B.C.E. and follows a different, possibly older, textual tradition than the Massoretic text. The relation of the Septuagint to the Hebrew Bible is itself a highly complex matter; the translation is often paraphrastic, and there are many errors and lacunae. But sometimes the Greek will be crystal clear where the Hebrew is muddled or meaningless. A simple instance occurs in 23:13:

For he [God] is in one, and who can turn him back?
What he wishes to do, he does.

The first phrase has been interpreted, with varying degrees of strain, as meaning "he is of one mind" or "he is alone in power." But the Septuagint, instead of *b'hd*, "in one," reads as if it is translating *bhr*, "has chosen":

For he has decided, and who can turn him back?
What he wishes to do, he does.

This makes perfect sense. And it is easy to account for the corruption: *r* was miswritten as *d*, which it closely resembles in Hebrew script; then some later scribe changed *bhd*, which has no meaning, to *b'hd*.

Emendation is one way of reaching a true text. Another is comparative philology. (There is no way to recover the true text; all interpretations are to some extent arbitrary; and in the end the only method is one's own intuition.) Quite a few of the obscure expressions in *Job* can be elucidated by reference to cognates in other ancient Near Eastern languages. One example occurs in 39:21:

He [the horse] paws in the valley and rejoices;
in strength he goes out to meet the weapons.

The noun *mq*, which usually means "valley" in Hebrew, means "strength, violence" in Akkadian and Ugaritic. There is an obvious parallel in the second line, and since parallelism is a structural principle of Hebrew poetry, the verse can with assurance be translated:

He paws violently and rejoices;
he runs furiously to meet the weapons.

Nevertheless, there are verses in *Job*, and even entire passages, which are so obscure, or where the text is so corrupt, that no solution seemed acceptable. I have omitted such verses when the omission did no damage to the continuity of the translation. I have also deleted scribal glosses and verses which seemed redundant or out of place, and have occasionally changed the order of verses as they appear in the Massoretic text.

The Elihu interlude, which has long been recognized as an addition by some later, much inferior poet, and the added Hymn to Wisdom that constitutes chapter 28, with its uncharacteristic stanza-form and its unruffled piety, have been left out as well.

Literal translations of *Job* may convey its sense more or less accurately, but no literal translation can hope to embody the grandeur and pulsing urgency of its style. In trying to make *Job* into a living poem, my primary obligations have been to the spirit of the original and to the rhythms of the English language. I have translated closely when possible, freely when necessary; and have not hesitated to improvise, on those few occasions when less drastic methods seemed inadequate.