

## CHAPTER IV

### MY GOD! WHY?

**A**FTER this opened Job his mouth,  
and cursed his day. <sup>2</sup>And Job  
answered and said:

- <sup>3</sup>Let the day perish wherein I was  
born,  
and the night which said,  
There is a man child conceived.
- <sup>4</sup>Let that day be darkness;  
let not God inquire after it from  
above,  
neither let the light shine upon  
it.
- <sup>5</sup>Let darkness and the shadow of  
death claim it for their own;  
let a cloud dwell upon it;  
let all that maketh black the day  
terrify it.
- <sup>6</sup>As for that night, let thick dark-  
ness seize upon it:  
let it not rejoice among the days of  
the year;  
let it not come into the number of  
the months.
- <sup>7</sup>Lo, let that night be barren;  
let no joyful voice come therein.
- <sup>8</sup>Let them curse it that curse the  
day,  
who are skillful to rouse up levia-  
than.
- <sup>9</sup>Let the stars of the twilight thereof  
be dark:  
let it look for light, but have none;  
neither let it behold the eyelids of  
the morning:
- <sup>10</sup>because it shut not up the doors of  
my *mother's* womb,  
nor hid trouble from mine eyes.
- <sup>11</sup>Why died I not from the womb?  
why did I not give up the ghost  
when I came out of the belly?
- <sup>12</sup>Why did the knees receive me?  
or why the breasts, that I should  
suck?
- <sup>13</sup>For now should I have lien down  
and been quiet;
- I should have slept; then had I  
been at rest:
- <sup>14</sup>with kings and counsellors of the  
earth, which built up waste places  
for themselves;
- <sup>15</sup>or with princes that had gold,  
who filled their houses with silver:
- <sup>16</sup>or as an hidden untimely birth  
I had not been;  
as infants which never saw light.
- <sup>17</sup>There the wicked cease from  
troubling;  
and there the weary be at rest.
- <sup>18</sup>There the prisoners are at ease  
together;  
they hear not the voice of the task-  
master.
- <sup>19</sup>The small and great are there;  
and the servant is free from his  
master.
- <sup>20</sup>Wherefore is light given to him  
that is in misery,  
and life unto the bitter in soul;
- <sup>21</sup>which long for death, but it  
cometh not;  
and dig for it more than for hid  
treasures;
- <sup>22</sup>which rejoice exceedingly,  
and are glad, when they can find  
the grave?
- <sup>23</sup>*Why is light given* to man whose  
way is hid,  
and whom God hath hedged  
in?
- <sup>24</sup>For my sighing cometh like my  
meat,  
and my roarings are poured out  
like water.
- <sup>25</sup>For the thing which I fear cometh  
upon me,  
and that which I am afraid of  
cometh unto me.
- <sup>26</sup>I am not at ease, neither am I  
quiet, neither have I rest;  
but trouble cometh.

As his friends sat there day after day, full of sympathy but unable to comfort—for what words of comfort can one speak to the sinner?—Job realized that it was not only the wicked of his own town and the fickle mob that had turned their backs on him, but also the wisest and best among his own friends. It may well be that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar were rising to leave, their period of mourning ended, when Job broke out into one of the most moving passages of the Bible.

As literature Job 3 is magnificent; so much so that it sweeps us along by its very vehemence and keeps our minds from asking what it all means.

*He cursed the day of his birth* (v. 1, R.S.V.). It is, alas, no rare experience to meet the man who has enjoyed health, riches and honour, who in middle life has lost all three and who longs for death. But it is most rare for such a one to say, at least with any conviction, unless indeed his conscience is already making him feel the flames of Hell, "I wish I had never been born." He has lived, and for most of the time living was good; even the final suffering cannot rob the earlier years of their sweetness. But it is precisely this that Job is saying with such vehemence. It is true the chapter ends (vv. 20–26) with the wish that he were dead, but this is subsidiary to the main thought.

There is only one strictly comparable passage in the Bible, viz. Jer. 20: 7–18). Not only is there an obvious literary resemblance between Jer. 20: 14–18 and Job 3: 3–10, however it is to be explained, but I believe a striking spiritual similarity between the two men can be demonstrated as well.

As a young man Jeremiah had followed the call of God to be a prophet. He could have reasonably expected recognition and honour, at least from the better elements among his people, and the joy of fellowship with God in his own heart. He found himself rejected by all and had apparently lost his relationship with God. I believe that in a very much simpler way this was true of Job as well. It is to be noticed that in this tremendous outburst Job does not refer to his material loss and physical affliction at all, unless it is by implication. It is only our knowledge of the circumstances that tempts us so to understand v. 24:

For my sighing comes as my bread,  
and my groanings are poured out like water (R.S.V.).

There is some element of doubt in vv. 25f. as to the best translation, but there can be little doubt that the translators of the A.V. were misled by preconceived theory. The R.S.V., which is substantially the same as the R.V., seems to give the meaning:

For the thing that I fear comes upon me,  
and what I dread befalls me.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;  
I have no rest; but trouble comes.

This is surely looking to something quite other than his physical afflictions.

Let us take a closer look at Job himself. Throughout the book he is presented, as are his friends, as a member of the highly respected class of the Wise. He was obviously brought up in the strict orthodoxy of the time, for which it was beyond dispute that prosperity was the result and reward of godfearing goodness, and disaster and suffering of wrongdoing. He is portrayed to us as *tam* (1: 1, 8, 2: 3). The meaning of the word is "completeness" rather than "perfection." All sides of his life and character were harmoniously developed. The R.S.V. and Moffatt in rendering "blameless," are probably as near as we can get to the thought of the Hebrew. The whole orthodoxy of the time proclaimed that this man should prosper, and in fact for many years he did. Then disaster, absolute and horrible, swept over him. Since Job never claims sinlessness, he might have welcomed some normal trouble as the acceptable chastisement of God. But with the afflictions that are his there is only one logical course for him to follow. He must agree with the unanimous voice of the world and of his friends and accept that he is the chief of sinners.

Here is Job's problem. If his theology is correct, he is the chief of sinners, but he *knows* he is not. But if he listens to the testimony of his own heart, then his theology, on which he has built up his whole life, must be wrong. The fact that his concepts of God and man are rudimentary compared to the highly developed ones of Christian dogmatics does not mean that we are not entitled to use the word theology, when speaking of him. This thought is more agonizing even than the thought that he may be the chief of sinners. So he finds that the firm moorings of his life have vanished; that the ship of his life is adrift on the dark ocean, without chart, without light, being carried he knows not where.

He turns to his friends for sympathy, advice and comfort, but dogmatic orthodoxy has ever been without heart or understanding. It cannot conceive of religion as a vitally free fellowship with God, but insists on confining it to the Procrustean bed of man's limited understanding of the omnipotence and all-wisdom and love of God. But though they have no understanding for the plight of their friend, it is the three who really help Job back to peace, for they so increase his anguish that they drive him back to God. It is noticeable that in virtually all of Job's answers to his friends, while he first reacts to what has just been said, he then turns from his friends to God. Much that he says in his anguish is false and exaggerated, and some of it is virtually blasphemous, but what matters is that he turns to God.