

Job 1 — The Wager in Heaven — Job of Uz, the Accuser in the Council, and the Man Who Worshipped in the Ruins

Job 1: In the land of Uz a blameless and upright man named Job — greatest of all the men of the east, father of seven sons and three daughters — offers continual burnt offerings for his children. In the heavenly council the accuser challenges whether Job fears God for nothing, and is given leave to strip away everything but Job's life; in one afternoon four messengers bring word that oxen, sheep, camels, servants, and all ten children are gone. Job rends his mantle, falls down, and worships. The book is set in a patriarchal age (no temple, no Moses, no Israel named); its composition is debated, its wisdom timeless.

The book of Job opens the way a great trial opens — not with the verdict, but with the record of the man on trial and the charge laid against him. And the strangest thing about this first chapter is that Job never hears the charge. We do. We are ushered behind a curtain Job cannot see, into a council in heaven where his name is spoken and his faith is put to the question, and then we are set back down on earth to watch a righteous man lose everything without ever being told why. That gap — between what heaven knows and what Job knows — is the engine of the whole book. Job will spend forty-one chapters demanding an answer we were handed in chapter one, and never getting it. The reader is meant to feel the weight of that. We know something Job does not; and knowing it, we are forbidden the friends' easy conclusion before they ever open their mouths.

Hebrew Word Studies

tam (H8535) (תָּם) — **perfect, blameless, whole, complete, of integrity vv. 1, 8.** The single most important word to get right in the book of Job. *Tam* is not the sinless perfection the English "perfect" imports; it is wholeness — a life without a divided heart, without a false seam. The related noun *tom* means "integrity," and it is exactly the word God uses in the next chapter to insist that Job "still holdeth fast his integrity" (Job 2:3). Noah wears the same word — "a just man and perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9) — and no one imagines Noah was without sin. The Psalmist prays for it as a way to walk, not a trophy to hold: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright" (Ps. 37:37). So when God calls Job *tam*, he is not certifying a man who never erred; he is vouching for a man who is genuinely, undividedly his — which is precisely why the accusation that follows is so cutting. The charge is not that Job's goodness is fake, but that it is *bought*. And the Savior's own summons, "Be ye therefore perfect" (Matt. 5:48), asks for this same wholeness — a heart made complete and single toward God — not a flawless record we could never produce. Job is where the Old Testament first shows us what it costs to stay *tam* when every reason to stay so has been taken away.

barak (H1288) (בָּרַךְ) — **to bless — and, by reverent euphemism, to curse vv. 5, 10, 11, 21.** One of the strangest and most revealing words in the chapter, because it means both blessing and its opposite. *Barak* is "to bless" — the Lord "blessed the work of his hands" (v. 10), and Job cries "blessed be the name of the LORD" (v. 21). Yet the same verb is what the King James translators render "cursed" in verse 5 ("cursed God in their hearts") and "curse" in verse 11 ("he will curse thee to thy face"). The scribes could not bring themselves to write the words "curse" and "God" together, so a pious euphemism took over: to "bless" God, said with a certain tone, meant to renounce him — the way we might bitterly say someone "said goodbye" to their faith. The whole drama of the chapter lives inside this one word. The accuser predicts Job will *barak* God to his face — meaning curse. Job, robbed of everything, chooses the true sense: he *baraks* the name of the Lord — meaning bless. The verb the tempter weaponized becomes the verb of Job's worship. Which reading of *barak* a soul chooses under loss is, in the end, the entire test.

ha-satan (H7854) (הַשָּׂטָן) — **the adversary, the accuser, the prosecutor vv. 6, 7, 8, 9, 12.** In Job 1 the word carries the definite article — *ha-satan*, "the accuser" — which makes it a title rather than a personal name, the way "the prosecutor" names a role. The root *satan* means to oppose, to accuse, to stand against; the same figure appears "standing at his right hand to resist him" in Zechariah 3:1, playing the prosecutor against the high priest. That courtroom flavor is exactly right for Job 1: the accuser's whole function is to bring a charge. And notice how tightly bounded he is. He comes only when the sons of God present themselves (v. 6); he answers only when questioned (v. 7); he can touch nothing until it is granted — "all that he hath is in thy power" (v. 12) — and even then a line is drawn he may not cross ("upon himself put not forth thine hand"). Scripture's mature testimony gathers this office into a person and a history — the one who "was a liar, and the father of it" (Jn. 8:44), who "accused them before our God day and night" until he was "cast down" (Rev. 12:10) — but the theology of Job's opening scene is already firm: the adversary is real, he is malicious, and he is *permitted*, never sovereign. He operates on a leash held in heaven. That is a mercy the friends never grasp and Job never learns, though the reader is given it from the start.

yare (H3373) / yare (H3372) (יָרֵא / יָרֵא) — fearing, God-fearing (adjective) / to fear, to revere (verb) vv. 1, 8, 9. The chapter's defining virtue is that Job "feared God" — but Hebrew fear of God is not terror, it is reverence, awe, the posture of a creature before the Creator that produces obedience and turns from evil. The adjective *yare* describes Job twice (vv. 1, 8): he is a God-fearing man. Then the accuser takes the verb form and turns it into his accusation: "Doth Job *fear* God for nought?" (v. 9). Same root, weaponized. The tempter grants that Job fears God; he only questions *why* — is the reverence free, or is it purchased by the hedge? This is the fault line of all Old Testament wisdom, for "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10) and "the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). Job's whole book asks whether that fear is real gold or gilded self-interest — whether a man reveres God for who God is, or only for what God gives. When Job worships in the ashes with nothing left to gain, the verb is finally vindicated: his fear of God was never for nought. It was never about the wages at all.

arom (H6174) (אֲרוֹם) — naked, bare, destitute v. 21. "*Naked* came I out of my mother's womb, and *naked* shall I return thither." The word is *arom* — bare, stripped, owning nothing. It is the word for Adam and Eve before the fall, who "were both naked... and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25), and the word for their exposure after it. Job reaches past all his lost wealth to the one condition that was true before he had any of it and will be true after: a human being arrives with empty hands and departs with empty hands. Paul will say it plainly — "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). The Preacher circles the same truth: "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return" (Eccl. 5:15). What Job grasps in his ruin is that his losses have not made him poorer than he started; they have only returned him to the nakedness that was always the truth beneath the hedge. Everything in between was grace. And a man who knows that everything was gift finds, even robbed, that he still has something no raider can carry off — the Giver himself. That is why he can bless. The hands are empty; the covenant is not.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Within that frame, two paired scenes rhyme against each other. Twice a "day" opens a movement — "there was a day" when the sons of God present themselves (v. 6), "there was a day" when Job's children are feasting (v. 13) — knotting the council in heaven to the feast on earth that is about to be destroyed. And the accuser's prediction (Job will barak God, meaning curse) stands against Job's response (Job baraks the name of the Lord, meaning bless) as the chapter's true hinge: one verb, two verdicts, and the man chooses the one heaven hoped for. It is not a chiasm, and I will not draw one where the text has not; the artistry here is the alternation of realms and the ironic turn on a single word, not a mirrored symmetry.