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April 20th: Job 18 & Hebrews 9:15-28

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Alastair Roberts

Bildad's second speech. The sacrificial inauguration of a new covenant.

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Transcript

Job chapter 18. The first steps are shortened, and his own schemes throw him down, for he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walks on its mesh. A trap seizes him by the heel, a snare lays hold of him.

A rope is hidden for him in the ground, a trap for him in the path. Terrors frighten him on every side, and chase him at his heels. His strength is famished, and calamity is ready for his stumbling.

It consumes the parts of his skin. The firstborn of death consumes his limbs. He is torn from the tent in which he trusted, and is brought to the king of terrors.

In his tent dwells that which is none of his. Sulphur is scattered over his habitation. His roots dry up beneath, and his branches wither above.

His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name in the street. He is thrust from light into darkness, and driven out of the world. He has no posterity or progeny among his people, and no survivor where he used to live.

They of the West are appalled at his day, and horrors seize them of the East. Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous. Such is the place of him who knows not God.

In Eliphaz's first speech in the second cycle of dialogues in chapter 15 verses 20-30, he had presented a portrait of the wicked. The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Dreadful sounds are in his ears.

In prosperity the destroyer will come upon him. He does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is marked for the sword. He wanders abroad for bread, saying, Where is it? He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand.

Distress and anguish terrify him. They prevail against him like a king ready for battle. Because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty, running stubbornly against him with a thickly basked shield.

Because he has covered his face with his fat and gathered fat upon his waist, and has lived in desolate cities, in houses that none should inhabit, which were ready to become heaps of ruins, he will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the earth. He will not depart from darkness. The flame will dry up his chutes, and by the breath of his mouth he will depart.

In the next speech by one of the friends, by Bildad in chapter 18, there is another portrait of the wicked presented. However, there is a difference between the way that Bildad presents the wicked and the way that Eliphaz does. For Eliphaz, the portrait of the wicked was designed to be cautionary for Job.

In the case of Bildad, it is more directly condemnatory. To Bildad's mind, Job clearly belongs in the category of the wicked, and there is not much of a promise laid out for his repentance and restoration. His speech serves more as an indictment.

Bildad's speech in this chapter, as with a number of Job's speeches and several of the friends' speeches, begins with a dismissive statement directed towards an interlocutor, in this case Job. Bildad's question, why are we counted as cattle, presumably referring to him and the friends, might be a reference back to chapter 12 verse 7 and Job's statement there, but ask the beasts, and they will teach you, the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you. Job had been scathingly dismissive of the friends' counsel, but yet he had turned their attention to the animals.

In Job's protest to this point, he has seemingly been challenging the Lord's moral governance of the universe. Bildad asks in verse 4 whether he expects that the whole world should be thrown into upheaval, the whole cosmic order reordered for his sake.

Norman Harbell suggests that the rock at the end of verse 4 might be a reference to the cosmic mountain.

While this is a possibility, for Bildad it is clearly the case that if Job is going to follow through with his protest, the whole of the cosmic order is thrown into uncertainty. Confidence in the Lord's righteous moral governance of the world is just as important as the stability of the ground beneath your feet. Throw the Lord's moral governance into question and all is cast into turmoil.

In the preceding chapter in Job's speech, in verses 11 to 12, he had said, in David Klein's reading, My days have passed, broken are my plans, the desires of my heart, which had turned night into day, brought light nearer than darkness. In verses 5 and 6, Bildad picks up the imagery of light and darkness, of the lamp of the wicked. The wicked man is deprived of what light he has, plunged into a realm of darkness.

Klein's observes a series of key metaphors that played throughout the rest of the chapter, the lamp in verses 5 to 7, the trap in verses 8 to 10, the disease in verses 11 to 13, dryness in verses 15 to 17, and annihilation in verses 18 to 20. The wicked man is a person who is caught in his own traps. In his development and exploration of this metaphor, Bildad might be playing with a way that he has characterised Job's words back in verse 2. Bildad literally speaks of Job trying to snare with words, something that Norman Harbell notices, relating it to the imagery of the trap later on in the chapter.

Job will be trapped on account of his own words. From the wicked falling into traps, being caught in snares, and being surrounded by terrors on all sides, Bildad moves to presenting him as one who is sapped of his strength, consumed and torn from his habitation. In verses 12 to 14, the habitation of the wicked is destroyed in the verses that follow.

With the trapping of the wicked, his wasting away, and the destruction of his habitation, the reputation, name, progeny and posterity of the wicked are entirely wiped out upon the face of the earth. His memory is extinguished, one of the most terrible fates that could befall someone in the ancient world. Bildad had already insensitively referred to Job's children back in chapter 8 verse 4, where he had suggested that the children had sinned against God and that they had been wiped out for this reason.

Here the suggestion seems to shift to Job being the one responsible for the destruction of his children. Job's children were wiped out in order to obliterate his name from the earth. Bildad sums up his message in verse 21, Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous, such is the place of him who knows not God.

The wicked is a person condemned to dryness, darkness, disease, distress, and finally annihilation. A question to consider, where else in the book of Job and elsewhere in the Old Testament do we find extended portraits of the wicked? Hebrews chapter 9 verses

15 to 28 Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established, for a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

Therefore not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you. And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship.

Indeed under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own. For then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all, at the end of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. The author of Hebrews concludes chapter 9 by comparing and contrasting the deaths by which the old and the new covenants were inaugurated. Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, a new order of affairs between God and humanity.

His death redeems those who have been called from their transgressions under the first covenant and the judgment that had been upon them. Christ isn't just the broker of some new agreement, he is a redeemer. Verses 16-17 are extremely challenging.

The key question is whether the word translated as will in the ESV, *diathēke*, should be translated as will or testament, or whether it should be understood as covenant. In verses 15 and 18 the word clearly refers to covenant. Of course it is entirely possible that the author of Hebrews is engaging in some wordplay in these verses.

Both a covenant and a will involve death on some level. There are many leading commentators that lean in both directions. However, Scott Hand's treatment of the passage in a 2005 paper has tipped many commentators in favour of the covenant

reading.

There are a number of other difficulties or questions raised by these verses. For instance, the word translated as be established in the ESV or be proven in some other translations in verse 16, in order to make sense of the reading as testament or will, is not the most naturally read in this manner. The translation be born might be a better one.

Verse 16 then could be rendered, for where there is a covenant, in the context clearly a broken covenant, the death of the covenant maker must be born. This develops the point of verse 15, the transgressions of the people under the first covenant had to be dealt with in order for the covenant to be established. Verse 17, which literally refers to deaths, not just a singular death, a detail that causes some problems for reading the text as a reference to testaments or wills, then relates to the way that the covenant is not enforced until it is enforced.

The deaths of covenant breakers, or deaths bearing their sins, needed to occur before the covenant could be enforced. As long as the covenant breakers remained alive, the covenant was not truly enforced. The author of Hebrews describes the inauguration of the old covenant in the covenant ceremony of Exodus chapter 24 verses 4-8.

And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord.

And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.

And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words. If blood was needed to deal with the breach of the covenant, it was also needed for its inauguration. In the covenant ceremony, the blood of the burnt offerings and peace offerings were placed upon the altar and the people.

Various parts of the tabernacle were also purified with blood. Without shedding of blood, forgiveness of sins is not possible. Some party needs to die to release people from the judgment lying upon their sins, purifying them.

In verses 23 and 24, the author of Hebrews returns to the theme of the sanctuary. Christ is a minister of the heavenly, not the earthly sanctuary. He is a minister in the true and the archetypal sanctuary, not the humanly constructed earthly replica that corresponds to it.

The rites of the earthly sanctuary, the shedding and placing of animal blood and the like,

purify the copies of the heavenly realities. They symbolize the greater sacrifices that are necessary in the heavenly realm. The need for better sacrifices to deal with the realities of the heavenly sanctuary underlines the importance of the greater sacrifice offered by Christ, our glorious High Priest.

There is an analogy between the operations of the heavenly sanctuary and the earthly sanctuary. However, the heavenly sanctuary is the greater of the two, and the earthly sanctuary and its sacrificial rites therefore point to the need for better sacrifices than it is able to perform itself. The earthly sanctuary needed cleansing on account of the sinfulness of the people, enabling access on their behalf to God's presence.

The work of Christ objectively changes the situation of humanity relative to the greater sanctuary of heaven itself, removing the barrier of our sins that once prevented our access. Christ deals with the problem of our sins, not simply in the replica of the heavenly, a limited representation of much higher and more mysterious things. Rather, he enters the very reality that they only symbolized, entering not merely into an earthly most holy place or inner sanctuary, but into heaven itself.

Nor was this a process constantly to be repeated year on year, without ever being completed, like the High Priest's annual entrance into the most holy place on the Day of Atonement with sacrificial blood of some animal. If this were the case, Christ's work would be an endlessly recurring cycle of entering and re-entering from the foundation of the world until its end. No, the sacrifice of Christ by which he enters is decisive and complete, it is a once-for-all event that need not be repeated, an entrance achieved by his own blood.

We should probably recognize that the point of the blood of Christ here is not the mere physical cleansing provided by the blood of animals, for which animals of a certain kind were largely interchangeable. Rather, the blood of Christ that saves us is not so much a physical bodily fluid as such. It is the offering of his uniquely faithful life symbolized by the pouring out of blood.

He has been poured out to death for us, an offering applied to us and into which we are included. Christ's sacrifice is not a constant cyclical movement, it is a definitive passage from one age to another. Christ deals with sin decisively at the end of the ages, sin in its singular form, sin as a dominant and determinative ruling force in the world.

There is still sinfulness in the world, but the ruling power of sin has been nullified and we need no longer live in its thrall. In Christ it no longer excludes us from God's presence, in Christ the condemnation no longer lies upon us in the same way. Christ's dealing with sin is a sort of a last day's appearance, it is the great apocalyptic event that the recurring day of atonement always awaited and anticipated.

As human beings we die once, and judgment occurs after death. Christ's work

corresponds with our need, he bears the death due to us in his first coming, so that in his second coming, his coming in judgment, he might deliver us into enjoyment of God's promise, rather than having to deal with our sins once more. A question to consider, how does Hebrew's contrast between the copies of the heavenly things and the heavenly things themselves help us better to understand how the earthly tabernacle and temple worked?