

Reflections of Primeval History

In light of the antiquity of the Book of Job, it is not surprising that it includes many references to the great events associated with the earth's primeval ages. Conversely, these references may be cited as evidence for the book's antiquity. They are not listed as a recitation of history, but are mentioned only in passing. This argues both for the historicity of the events and for the antiquity of the book itself. They are mentioned almost casually, suggesting that they were common knowledge at the time of writing, with no need to stress their historicity. The spreading system of pagan pantheism, with its underlying premise of long, cyclic ages and evolutionary changes, which soon infected all the dispersing post-Babel tribes, had apparently not yet made a significant impact on Job and his friends. In this chapter, therefore, references to the ancient histories will be noted, along with their significance, to provide an appropriate background for Job's message.

Creation

The official account of creation was given by God, probably through the first man, Adam, in the first two chapters of Genesis. These great chapters are the foundation of the Bible. Many other references to creation are scattered through the Bible, but none are more intriguing than those in Job.

The Book of Job assumes that God is the creator of all things. There are no references to other gods and no suggestion that the world evolved out of some earlier form, as pagan philosophers taught in ancient times. The creation of the heavens by God, “Which alone spreadeth out the heavens,” is noted in Job 9:8. God reminds Job that he “laid the foundations of the earth” Job 38:4). The establishment of day and night by the rotation of the earth is implied in Job 38:12-14.

Stars were created on the fourth day of creation week (Gen. 1:16), and this is mentioned in Job 9:9: “which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south.” Note also Job 26:13: “By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens.”

The creation of animals is the theme of the following classic passage: “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:7-10).

The latter verse reflects Genesis 1:21: “God created great whales, and every living creature (same as living soul).” It also reflects Genesis 2:7: “and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” The word *breath* is often the same in the Hebrew as *spirit*, and it is recognized in Job that man has both “soul” and “spirit.” In his discourse, Elihu refers to this verse: “The spirit of God (same as ‘breath

of God') hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life....I also am formed out of the clay" (Job 33:4-6). Note also Job's statement: "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils" (Job 27:3). Adam is even mentioned by name in Job 31:33.

It is significant also that God is called "the Almighty" more in Job than in all the rest of the Bible put together. The Hebrew word is *Shaddai*, and some commentators have unfortunately associated this with *shad*, the Hebrew word for *breast*, suggesting that this name stresses his character as the nourisher or even suggesting a female dimension to his nature. The Jews, however, who understood the etymology of their own language better than later Gentile scholars, translated it *pantokrator* in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament—a word that means almighty and nothing else. Its abundant use in Job still further stresses the recognition of God as the omnipotent creator by Job and his Semitic contemporaries.

The Fall and the Curse

When Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, God's curse, which included death, soon followed. The impact of this is felt deeply in Job. Elihu, for example, referred to Genesis 3:19 ("unto dust shalt thou return") when he said: "If [God] set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust" (Job 34:14—15).

The curse on woman and her offspring (Gen. 3:16—"in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children") is alluded to by Job: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.... Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (Job 14:1—4). Eliphaz says: "what is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job 15:14).

There are still other references to the curse. "Man is

born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7).

“Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay: and wilt thou bring me into dust again?” (Job 10:9)

“How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4).

Job climaxes all his discourses and his final complaint by referring to the sin of Adam which brought this great curse of God on the earth: “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom” (Job 31:33). He concludes by an implied reference to the specific terms of the curse itself: “Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended” (Job 31:40).

The Great Flood

The worldwide flood sent as a judgment from God in the days of Noah was much nearer than the creation to the time of Job, so it is not surprising that there are even more references to the flood than to creation. The chronology is uncertain, but if there are no significant gaps in the chronologies of Genesis 11, it is possible that Job’s experience could have occurred only 300 or so years after the flood.

The reason God destroyed the earth and all land animals, except those in the ark, was because “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and...every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Eliphaz, in his third discourse, recalled this fact: “Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was over-thrown with a flood: Which said unto God, depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?” (Job 22:15-17).

Evidence for the cataclysmic violence of the flood is found not only in the Bible but also in geological features all over the globe. The apostle Peter said: “The world [cosmos] that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6). This earth-changing, destructive physical cataclysm was well-remembered in traditions all

over the world, including the ancestral traditions of Job and his friends. In one of his discourses, Job said: "Behold, he [God] breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth" (Job 12:14-15).

The words dry up probably refer to the "waters...above the firmament" (Gen. 1:7) that were established on the second day of creation, resulting in a "greenhouse effect" that made rain impossible in the primeval world (Gen. 2:5). This global water blanket, probably water vapor, was withheld from the earth until God used it to "overturn the earth" in the days of Noah.

"He shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." When the appointed time came, Noah went into the ark "as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). There was only one "door of the ark" (Gen. 6:16), and it could not be opened until the earth had been overturned by the great waters.

The same word, referring to the same great overturning, occurs also in Job's previous discourse. "[God] removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not: and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea" (Job 9:5-8).

This passage, with verses following, interweaves God's creative works with the destructive work of the flood. Note also Job 28:9: "He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots." The fountains of the deep opened, the floodgates of heaven released their torrents, the waters rose higher than the mountains, erosion began to wash away the heights, and soon the roots of the mountains were overturned.

Job 26:11-14 suggests the unparalleled magnitude of the flood and its dual physical triggering phenomenon: "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his

reproof. He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud....Lo these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

Though obviously figurative language, it is very realistic. There were no literal pillars holding up the heavens any more than there were literal windows in heaven. Nevertheless, when the torrents of water began to pour down for the first time in history from "the waters which were above the firmament" (Gen. 1:7), it must have seemed that mighty supports restraining the floodgates of the heavenly reservoir had suddenly trembled and given way.

At the same time, the pre-flood seas were divided when the primeval crust opened all over the world and waters sprang out through the broken fountains of the deep. This "dividing" of the sea could not refer to the Red Sea opening up for Moses and the Israelites at the Exodus, for that event took place long after Job had spoken these words. They can only refer to the destruction of the great flood, which, indeed, was the unique time above all past times, when God "by his understanding....smiteth through the proud." Yet, as Job said, this is only a small portion of his power. The "thunder of his power" is reserved for a greater day of judgment yet to come.

End of the Flood

The Noahic flood marked a great discontinuity, both in the course of human history and in the normal operation of the natural processes that God had established supernaturally in the beginning. The rates of most geological processes (such as erosion, sedimentation, tectonism, and volcanism) were vastly accelerated during the year of the flood. God finally allowed the flood to run its course, after which all these rates gradually slowed, though much "residual catastrophism" persists even to the present day.

Job also refers to this drying-up period. "As the waters fail

from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: so man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep” (Job 14:11-12). The language reflects God’s post-flood promise to Noah: “while the earth remaineth” (Gen. 8:22), such a flood would never come again, and the basic constants of nature (earth’s axial rotation and orbital revolution, which control all daily and seasonal changes) would continue to be uniform until the day of the resurrection at the end of the age.

The dependability of nature and God’s promise not to allow another global flood are the subjects of other Joban passages. For example: “He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end” (Job 26:10). This passage again reflects God’s promise that “day and night shall not cease” and “neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen. 8:22, 9:11). God also reminded Job of the flood in these words: “Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?” (Job 38:8-11). This passage evidently refers to the waters that gushed up out of the subterranean depths on the fearful day that began the great flood, when “the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up (Gen. 7:11).

There are even hints of the post-flood Ice Age scattered throughout the Book of Job. When the thermal water vapor blanket (the waters above the firmament) rained on the earth during the flood, the greenhouse environment dissipated. Snow began to fall in the polar latitudes and eventually great ice sheets fanned out over the northern regions of Europe, Asia, and North America. This glacial period did not last for a million years or more, as evolutionary geologists believe, but it could have persisted for several centuries.

The ice sheets did not extend into Bible lands, but they

did undoubtedly affect their climates, producing much more rain, snow, and ice than occur today in those regions, known today for their heat and aridity.

Consequently, it may be significant that there are more references to cold, snow, ice, and frost in Job than in any other book of the Bible. It is possible that Job and his friends had heard tales of the glacial sheets bounding the northern lands, even though they had not seen them.

In any case, some of the snow references in Job may be worth noting. For example: "Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straightened" (Job 37:9-10).

The direct words of God, in his final message to Job, are especially interesting, though still enigmatic. "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" (Job 38:22-23). Then in Job 38:29-30, there is perhaps an even more significant comment, at least with respect to Job's awareness of the northern ice-covered lakes and seas. "Out of whose womb came the ice? And the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen." The picture of ice emerging as from a womb seems most applicable to the slow advance of glaciers.

It is possible to interpret all these passages in other ways. Nevertheless, it seems highly significant that the entire Book of Job can be so easily and naturally understood in the context of a world only recently recovered from the devastation of the great flood.

The Worldwide Dispersion

Another world-changing event of the primeval ages was the confusion of languages at Babel and the following dispersion of the nations. This event, described in Genesis 10 and 11, is also reflected in Job.

When Noah and his sons left the ark after the flood God told them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [that is, fill] the earth" (Gen. 9:1). Their descendants, however (perhaps excluding Shem and some of his sons), chose instead to remain at Babel under the leadership of Nimrod, son of Cush (same as Ethiopia), son of Ham (Gen.10:8-10). To thwart this growing rebellion and to enforce his command to fill the earth, God "did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:9).

This traumatic beginning of the nations seems to be in view in the latter part of Job 12, after Job mentions the flood in verses 14-16. Beginning at verse 17: "He leadeth counselors away spoiled [possibly a reference to the consultation of Nimrod's rebels 'one to another' planning the insurrection against God 'which they have imagined to do'—note Genesis 11:3-6], and maketh the judges fools," babbling incoherently to each other!

"He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death" (Job 12:20-22). This may refer to the Satanic conspiracy that persuaded Nimrod to build his tower unto the heavens and to emblaze on its summit astrological signs for worshiping the host of heaven, the rebellious angels under Satan.

Next came the scattering of the various families from Babel, forcing each to find its own geographical region and to establish its own culture. Some succeeded, others died out. "He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: He enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again. He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man" (Job 12:23-25).

It is worth noting that a number of the tribal names mentioned in Job are first encountered in the table of

Nations (Gen. 10), which listed seventy nations that evidently resulted from the Babel dispersion. Note the following:

Uz (Gen. 10:23; see Job 1:1);

Sheba (Gen. 10:7, 28; see Job 6:19);

Ophir (Gen. 10:29; see Job 28:16);

Ethiopia (same as Cush, Gen. 10:6; see Job 28:19);

Seba (same as Sabaeans, Gen. 10:7; see Job 1:15).

This comparison further emphasizes the antiquity of Job. The Chaldeans (see Job 1:17) are first mentioned in connection with Abraham's boyhood home in Ur (Gen. 11:28), but Ur may originally have been Uruk, or Erech (Gen. 10:10).

Other tribal names in Job may include Tema, son of Ishmael (Gen. 25:15; see Job 6:19), Teman, grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:15; see Job 2:11); Shuah (son of Abraham by Keturah, as listed in Gen. 25:2, and probable ancestor of Bildad, the Shuhite: see Job 2:11); and Buz (nephew of Abraham, noted in Gen. 22:21, an ancestor of Elihu, as suggested in Job 32:2). All of these long predate Moses.

In addition to the tribes and nations named in the early chapters of Genesis and those known from ancient secular history, many, for some reason (perhaps lack of ability or industry, degenerate habits, or disease), could not compete successfully and eventually died out. These most likely included "cave men" and others now identified only by fragmentary fossils and crude artifacts and often mistakenly classed as evolving hominids or "ape-men."

Job and his contemporaries evidently were aware of some of these degenerate peoples, still barely surviving. Those he noted as wanderers in the wilderness or as those groping in the dark without light (Job 12:24-25) were very

likely those living in deserts, jungles, or caves.

Note also his description of certain other brutish people: “For want and famine they were solitary; fleeing into the wilderness in former time desolate and waste, Who cut up mallows by the bushes, and juniper roots for their meat. They were driven forth from among men, (they cried after them as after a thief;) To dwell in the cliffs of the valleys, in caves of the earth, and in the rocks. Among the bushes they brayed; under the nettles they were gathered together. They were children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth” (Job 30:3-8).

Numerous indications scattered through the Book of Job indicate its great antiquity. Its whole outlook and atmosphere is essentially the same as in the early chapters of Genesis. Job probably lived sometime between Abraham and Moses, but he represents a point of view outside that of the genealogical line leading from Abraham to Moses.

God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for very good reasons, but he had not forgotten his other “sheep...which are not of this fold” (John 10:16). In fact, of all the people in the earth in that day, including those in the line of the chosen people, God himself testified that there was no one in all the world giving a better testimony “unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10) of God’s redemptive grace and righteousness than his servant Job.