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BLAKE'S *Job* was first published in 1966.

BLAKE'S *JOB*

William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY BY

S. FOSTER DAMON



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ILLUSTRATION I

Thus did Job continually

Job was "the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job i : 3). He was enormously wealthy and consequently enormously powerful. Whenever he appeared in public he created a sensation; in the council, the princes and nobles were silent while they drank in his speeches; and his was the last word. After his ruin, he recalled bitterly this time of his "glory" (Job xxix : 7-25).

His private life was strict. He had risen to his high estate by conscientiousness, hard work, justice, and sobriety. He denied himself all unnecessary pleasures—he had not earned his wealth by dissipation; yet he prided himself on his extensive charities (Job xxix : 12-16; xxxi : 16-22). He had married a wife who adored him and had raised a fine family of seven sons and three daughters.

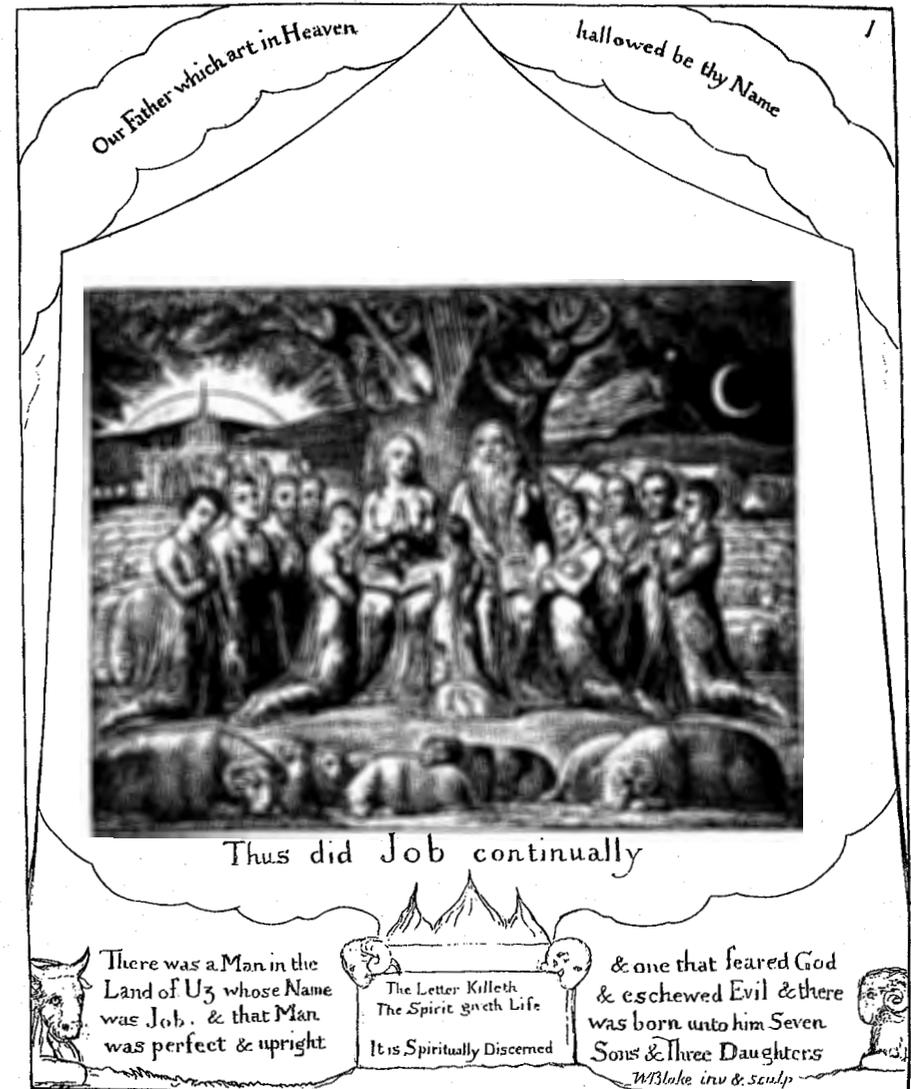
But above all, Job was pious. He ran his life according to the books of Law. His reward was his wealth, which he believed he had obtained through the favor of his God, who pronounced him "perfect." Consequently he could not help secretly thinking very well of himself.

In the illustration, Job and his family are still in the pastoral state of Innocence. They are shown at their evening prayers. The moment is sacred; therefore all the family's musical instruments are silenced, beginning with Job's own harp and his wife's lute, although the two youngest boys have clung to their pipe and lyre. These instruments are those of spontaneous praise; but Job's prayers are being read from books written by others, while the children kneel humbly.

Job basically is a good man, although he has never recognized the true God. Therefore on his right is his spiritual wealth, a Gothic church, and on his left his material wealth, the flocks and barns. But the sun is setting.

Job's errors are these: he fears God instead of loving him as a friend; he "eschews evil," thus condemning half of life; and he relies on the Letter that Kill-eth, and thus has closed himself to Spiritual Discernment. Deepest of all is his secret Pride, which must be humbled.

Cycle: First
State: Innocence
Eye: Lucifer
Contrary: Illustration XXI



London. Published as the Act directs. March 8. 1828. by Will Blake N^o 5 Fountain Court Strand.

Proof

ILLUSTRATION II

When the Almighty was yet with me, When my Children were about me

Job's inner life is now opened for us. His God is Job's own ideal, and therefore bears Job's likeness. This God reigns supreme with the book of Law open in his lap. Being Job's own ideal, he can claim that Job is "perfect."

But Job is too conscientious to accept this claim complacently and uncritically. Law implies judgment, and this judgment by Job's God raises a question. At once, Satan the Accuser appears before the Lord. Job himself (for this takes place within his own brain, as indicated by the cloud-barriers, which separate worlds) is questioning his own piety: may it not be merely gratitude for his material prosperity? Surely he has eschewed evil, but real virtue is positive, not negative. His pharisaic pride in his own perfection has admitted into his heaven the Accuser, who is casting doubt on that perfection: "Doth Job fear God for nought?" (Job i : 9).

The two dim faces beneath the arms of Satan are the shadowy error of Job and his wife. Until that error is given definite form, it cannot be recognized and cast out.

To answer Satan, angels cast before the throne the scrolls of Job's spontaneous good deeds (only one angel has a book, and that is partly closed); but the Almighty has no scroll: he does not consider such trifles. Yet on earth, angels minister to Job with scrolls of song, although Job himself holds upright the book of Law on his left knee. His wife and all but one of their children also hold books, for Job has tried to bring up his children properly. He knows the dangers that threaten the children of the rich: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job xxi : 13-14). Job knows that his own children feast every night; consequently in the morning he sacrifices for them: "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (Job i : 4-5). But he does not want to know definitely how they are really acting.

Therefore he turns his back on his eldest son, who already has abandoned his book for a scroll. He sits with his mistress (none of the sons are married) and their baby. He is living his life according to his own instincts. This is the natural reaction of children against the perfection of a stern father.

The margins develop the idea of the illustration. Below are Job and his wife, still in the pastoral state of Innocence. But in the living Gothic decorations are the peacock of pride and the parrot of vain repetitions. Angels weep over the pillars of cloud and flame that led the Israelites through the wilderness to Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were revealed. After Satan's title is written in Hebrew his identification as "King Jehovah."

Cycle: First
 State: Innocence
 Eye: Lucifer
 Contrary: Illustration XVI



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Provi

ILLUSTRATION V

Then went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord

This scene is not in the Bible, but is one of the finest in Blake's system. Job is sharing his last loaf with a blind beggar. He does it for the same reason that he has done everything else: because it is the correct thing to do, not because he naturally wishes to do it, as a man would share his last meal with a starving friend. Such charity as Job's can be given—and taken—only with the left hand, for true sympathy is absent. Job can make the gesture of charity to a beggar whose sins he cares nothing about, although he treated his own children harshly. Even so, this charity is a spiritual act (his right foot protrudes from beneath his robe), as Job wants to do the best thing, even if he cannot do it in the proper spirit. He is right, though for the wrong reason. Therefore angels still minister to him.

Therefore also Job's God keeps his seat by clinging to his book of Law, though, with a dimmed and sinking halo, he is dragged down on the material side. The scroll, which represents the better side of life that he has ignored, appears, dangling and unnoticed, in his left hand.

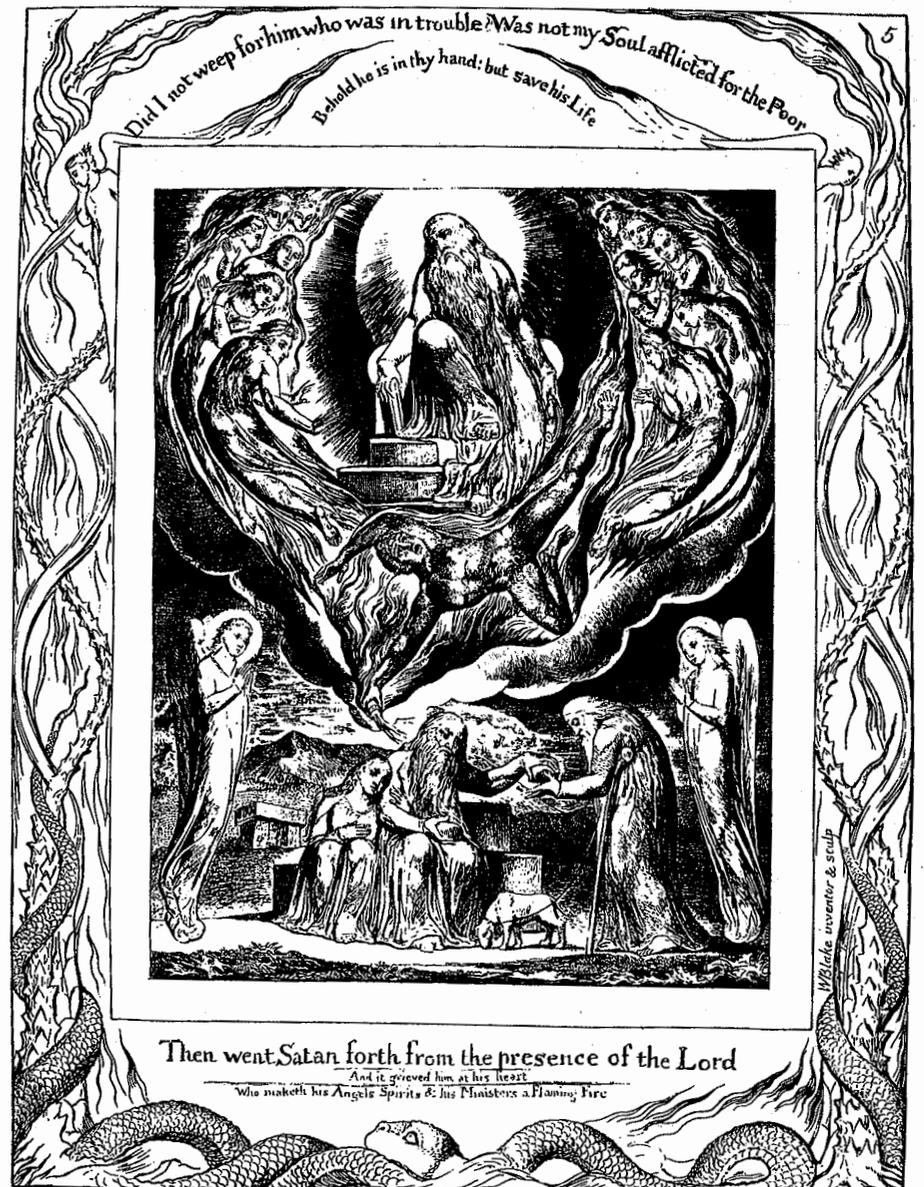
The fires that Satan concentrates on the head of Job are the fires of guilt; the appalled angels shrink from them.

The Gothic church has disappeared, for Job is now in error. The druid architecture has replaced it, symbolic of the primal, brutal religion of Moral Law which sacrifices others but not the Self.

The sympathy of Job's wife is in direct contradiction to the Biblical account. There she urged her husband to curse God and die; here she supports her husband with perfect confidence and love.

The margins are filled with flames and briars, and below is the serpent, at last fully revealed, though not to Job.

Cycle: First
State: Experience
Eye: Elohim
Contrary: Illustration XIX



*Did I not weep for him who was in trouble? Was not my Soul afflicted for the Poor
 Behold he is in thy hand: but save his Life*

Then went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord
And it grieved him at his heart
Who maketh his Angels Spirits & his Ministers a Flaming Fire

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ILLUSTRATION XIII

Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind

At last, in the Whirlwind of the mystical ecstasy, the true God appears. He is Jesus, the Divine Imagination, and the Forgiveness of Sins: the only God whom Blake recognized. He is in the cruciform position and his right foot is forward. He descends below the cloud-barriers which normally separate the worlds. Job and his wife face God with serene joy. The power of the wind raises Job's hair in an agreeable thrill, to be contrasted with the horror-struck erected hair of Eliphaz (Illustration IX). Meanwhile, the friends cannot see God because the blast blows them flat, like the Forest of Error in the margin below.

The Lord's response to Job is not a reasoned reply to his complaints, but is instead a typically mystical and fundamentally ineffable vision of God's divine power in the greatness, the glory, and the harmony of his creation, the universe. Job's pride is crushed at last; his life is made straight; his faith is confirmed.

Thirteen is the number of Death (as also in Blake's *The Gates of Paradise*); it is therefore necessarily the number of the New Birth.

The upper margin continues the circular motion of the Whirlwind. The figures are the six Eyes in their rotation; inevitably they have reached the seventh, who is Jesus (within the illustration), although the Lord's likeness is that of Job. Behind Job's head (in the outer margin) is the suggestion of an eighth Eye: this is Job's own Individuality, "an Eighth Image Divine, tho' darken'd and tho' walking as one walks in sleep, and the Seven comforted him and supported him" (*Milton* 15 : 5-7).

Cycle: Second
 State: The New Life
 Eye: Jesus
 Contrary: Illustration XI



ILLUSTRATION XXI

So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning

And here the story of Job ends. The long night is over and the sun rises. In the west is the moon, attended by two stars, one of which is the morning star, Lucifer. Job's manhood, purged of all error, is now complete, and his wealth is doubled (Job xlii : 10). The whole family is reunited in harmony; the sons and daughters are restored. No longer do they kneel, no longer are they silent. They and their parents make a joyful noise unto the Lord with the musical instruments formerly hung on the tree. The books of Law have disappeared. The three arts join in the celebration: the daughter on the right plays a lyre (music), and the girl in front sings from a scroll (poetry); the slender book held by the third daughter represents painting.

The Justice of the Old Testament and the Mercy of the New are united: "they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Revelation xv : 3).

Cycle: Third
 State: The New Life
 Eye: Lucifer
 Contrary: Illustration I



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