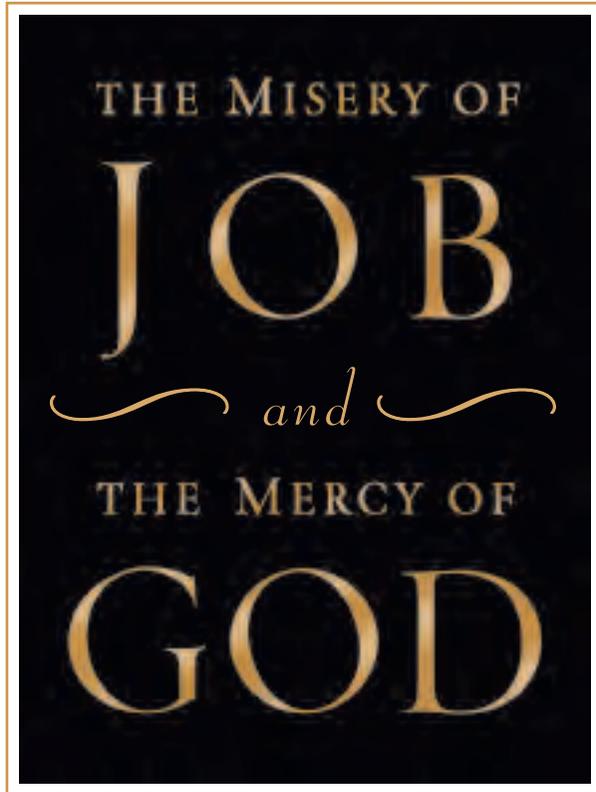


THE MISERY OF
JOB
and
THE MERCY OF
GOD

JOHN PIPER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RIC ERGENBRIGHT

JOHN PIPER



WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY
RIC ERGENBRIGHT

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The Misery of Job and the Mercy of God

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This book is dedicated
to those who suffer loss and pain
along the path that leads to life.



*He is not poor nor much enticed
Who loses everything but Christ.
It won't be long before the rod
Becomes the tender kiss of God.*

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A WORD OF THANKS



The first time I saw and read Ric Ergenbright's beautiful book, *The Art of God*, I knew I had found a brother in spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things. Thank you, Ric, for embracing the vision unfolded in *The Misery of Job and the Mercy of God*. It is a great honor that you would beautify these pages with your art, and God's.

A WORD TO THE READER



It is a great sadness when sufferers seek relief by sparing God his sovereignty over pain. The sadness is that this undercuts the very hope it aims to create. When all forty-two chapters of the book of Job are said and done, the inspired author leaves us with an unshakable and undoubted fact: God governs all things for his good purposes.

The text says Job's brothers and sisters "comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him" (Job 42:11). This is the author speaking, not a misguided character in the drama. Whatever Satan's liberty in unleashing calamity upon us, God never drops the leash that binds his neck.

Jesus' brother James rounds out the picture with his interpretation: "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11). In other words, the Lord is sovereign, and the Lord is sweet.

Pain and loss are bitter providences. Who has lived long in this world of woe without weeping, sometimes until the head throbs and there are no more tears to lubricate the convulsing of our amputated

love? But O, the folly of trying to lighten the ship of suffering by throwing God's governance overboard. The very thing the tilting ship needs in the storm is the ballast of God's good sovereignty, not the unburdening of deep and precious truth. What makes the crush of calamity sufferable is not that God shares our shock, but that his bitter providences are laden with the bounty of love.

I have written for sufferers. I pray that you will be helped to endure till healing, or to die well. One who suffered more than most wrote: "To live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Which of these will be our portion, God himself will decide. "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

The great purpose of life is not to stay alive, but to magnify—whether by life or by death—the One who created us and died for us and lives as Lord of all forever, Jesus Christ. I pray that his sovereign goodness will sustain you in the unyielding joy of hope through every flame of pain and flood of fear. To that end I set before you *The Misery of Job and the Mercy of God*.

As poetry, it is meant to be heard as well as read. To that end I have recorded my own reading of the poem on the accompanying CD. I pray that both the sound and the meaning will carry the truth to your mind and heart.

John Piper



PART ONE

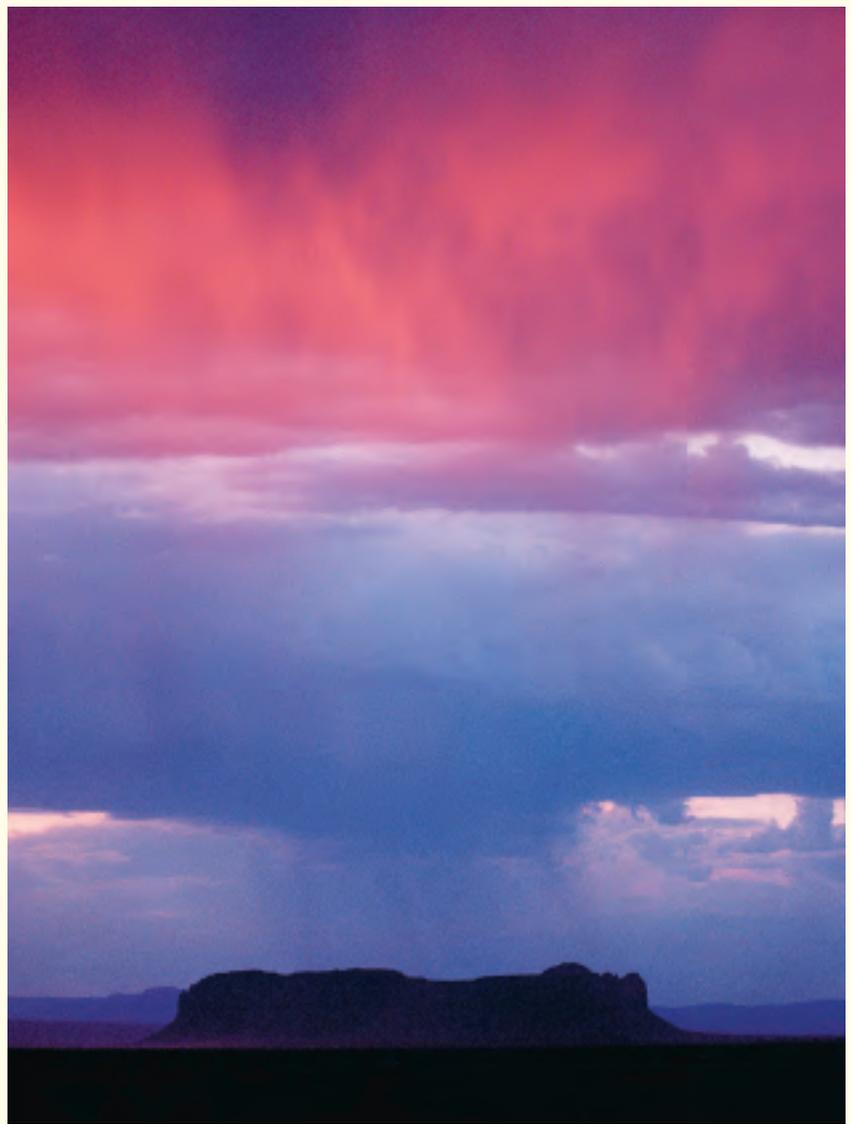


O GOD,
HAVE MERCY
ON MY SEED



*There was a man in the land of Uz
whose name was Job.*

JOB 1:1a ESV



The sky above the land of Uz
Could change the way the ocean does
In moments, with a boding wind,
As though the blue of day had sinned,
And brought the blood of some great saint
Upon the darkening east - the taint
Of some Leviathan, up-swirled
Beneath the waters of the world,
Or worse, poured down like thick'ning gore
From some great struggle in the war
Of heav'n.



But Job had seen the years
Change dark and early-morning fears
To pleasant afternoons and clear
Night-skies, star-strewn and bright from here
To who knows where beyond the brink
Of earth and heav'n. So Job would drink
His desert-berry wine, and walk
Along his garden paths, and talk
Of all the years that God had made
His fields to bear the golden blade
For camels, oxen, asses, sheep -
Eleven thousand mouths to keep
With grain and grass and streams - and not
A flood or drought or wasting rot,
Or pestilence, or early freeze,
Or looting from his enemies.
And Job would lift his hands to God,
And wonder why he spared the rod
Of suffering. Each day he blessed
The gentleness of God, confessed
His hope in God alone, and said,



“O Lord, if this were lost instead,
And all I had was you, I would
Be rich, and have the greatest Good.
But I do love my seven sons,
And all my daughters, Lord, the ones
Above all land and name and wealth,
And even, God, above my health.
For them I praise and bless your name,
And pray that any sin or blame
In them would be forgiven by
The mercy you have shown in sky
And earth these forty years that they
Have lived now even to this day.”

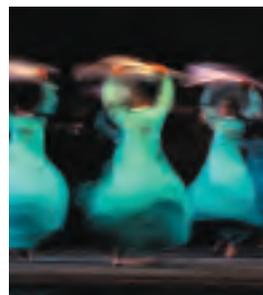


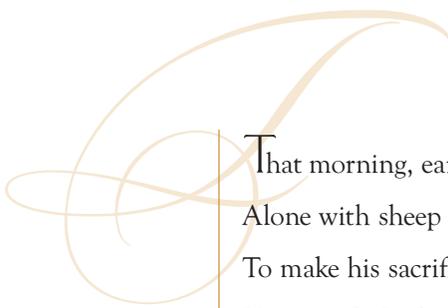
And every seven days Job made
 A sacrifice for them. He laid
 A lamb across the stone and prayed,
 "O God, if they have sinned, and played
 The fool and cursed your name, lay not
 This folly to their charge, but blot
 It out with this lamb's blood, and heed
 My prayer: Far better one should bleed
 For all, than all unpardoned live
 And prosper without God. Forgive,
 O Lord, and let your pardon pull
 My sons from wealth and make them full
 Of God." Thus Job would bow and seek
 To save his children every week.

For seven days his sons would feast,
 Down from the eldest to the least,
 Each day a different son and spouse
 Would play the host, and make their house
 A banquet hall for all the rest.
 The daughters too would come, all dressed

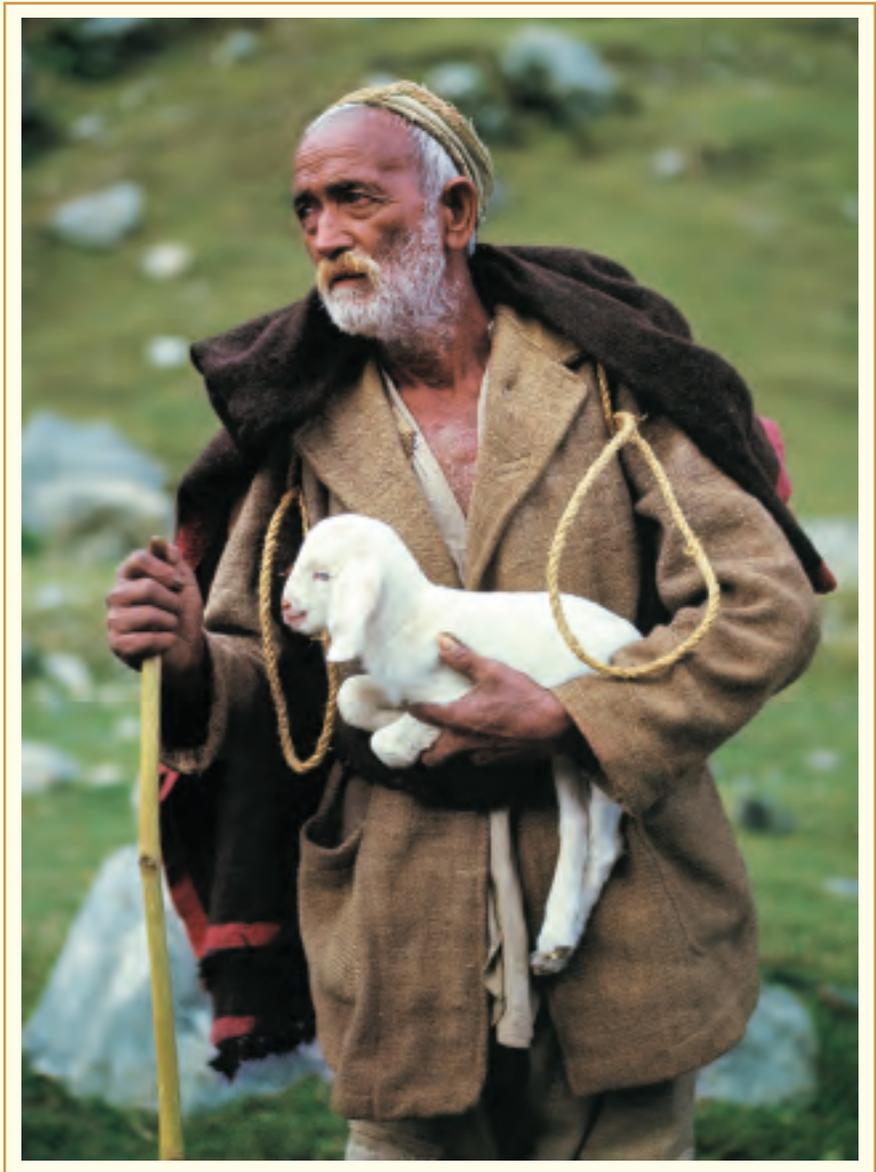


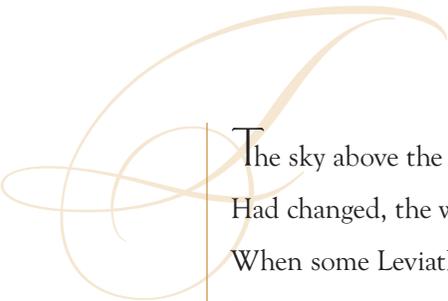
In finest fabrics from the looms
Across the land of Uz, with plumes
And jewels in their hair. And they
Would eat the finest foods and play
And dance and sing as if in all
The world there were no pain or gall
To see, much less to bear; nor was
Their father ever there, because
He carried in his soul a weight
Too heavy for the young, for late-
Night levity and bantering.
They knew about his offering
The lambs each week, and how he'd pray.
And so Job wasn't there the day
His children gathered to begin
Their seven days of feasting in
Their favorite place, when work was done,
The home of Zachan, oldest son.





That morning, early, Job had gone
Alone with sheep and knife, at dawn,
To make his sacrifice. And while
He prayed, God put his heart on trial:
“O man of God, today again
You seek the precious lives of ten
Young souls. Now tell me, with your heart,
Would you be willing, Job, to part
With all your children, if in my
Deep counsel I should judge that by
Such severing more good would be,
And you would know far more of me?”
Job trembled at the voice, and fell
Before the bleeding lamb. “Compel
Me not, O God, to make this choice,
Between the wisdom of your voice
And these ten treasures of my life.
Far better I should take this knife
And mingle lamb’s blood with my own
Than put my children on this stone.
O God, have mercy on my seed.
I yield to what you have decreed.”





The sky above the land of Uz
Had changed, the way the ocean does,
When some Leviathan, up-swirled
Beneath the waters of the world
Roils deep and turns the regal blue
To gray. And streams blood-red broke through
The dawn and flowed along the brink
Of earth and heaven as if the link
Were in dispute, and some great war
Were being fought to settle more
Than even blood-red skies would seem,
Or Job, awake, could ever dream.



That afternoon, beneath a gray
And boding sky – the time of day
When families begin to feast –
Job sat alone, and watched the east
Grow dark, and felt the outskirts of
A distant wind that made him love
His children more.

And then a man,
With torn and bloody garments ran
To Job and fell before his seat.
“O master, only these two feet,
Of all your servants still can run.
Sabeans struck, and everyone
Is dead, and all the oxen teams
And asses gone; I hear the screams.
O master, this has never been
Before. M’Lord, what is our sin?”





And while the question lingered in
The air, the silence broke again.
Another servant ran and fell
Before the man: "Job, whether hell
Or heav'n, I am not sure, but God
Has loosed a flame and awful rod
Against this house, and all your sheep,
And wool, and lambs, and all who keep
Them safe from wolves are burned to death
With fire, and I alone have breath.
O master, why? What have we done?"
And while he spoke, another one,
A servant from the camel herd,
Came running with his bloody word:
"Chaldeans took them all and slew
The servants. Only I got through
To tell you that we've lost it all.
O master, every bed and stall
Is empty now. What will we do?
What will we do?"



And as the hue
Turned crimson in the western sky,
Job waited wordless with his eye
Fixed on the dark and distant hill
Where Zachan lived, and ate his fill
Tonight with all that Job possessed.
And then the servant came, and pressed
His face against Job's knees and wept.
Job knew the man that Zachan kept
For special errands, so he laid
His hand on him: "Don't be afraid,
But speak." "Good master, I do fear
To speak what you might die to hear."
"Speak, man." And so the servant said,
"Your sons and daughters, Job, are dead.
A wind came from the wilderness.
We couldn't know. No one could guess
That it would blow like that. The whole
House fell at once, and every soul
Is dead."



The servants waited now
To see what Job would do, and how
He might deal with his God. At last
He rose, and took a knife, and passed
It like a razor over all
His silver head, and tore his shawl
And robe, and fell facedown upon
The ground and lay there till the dawn.
The servants knelt by him in fright,
And heard him whisper through the night:
“I came with nothing from the womb,
I go with nothing to the tomb.
God gave me children freely, then
He took them to himself again.
At last I taste the bitter rod,
My wise and ever blessed God.”





And now come, broken, to the cross,
Where Christ embraced all human loss,
And let us bow before the throne
Of God, who gives and takes his own,
And promises - whatever toll
He takes - to satisfy our soul.
Come, learn the lesson of the rod:
The treasure that we have in God.
He is not poor nor much enticed
Who loses everything but Christ.





PART TWO

THAT I SHOULD
BEAR THIS PAIN,
NOT YOU



*The LORD gave,
and the LORD has taken away;
blessed be the name of the LORD.*

JOB 1:21b ESV

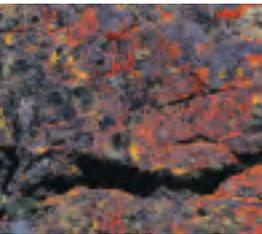


The morning after Job had lost
His children and his wealth, he crossed
The half-plowed pasture to the east,
And made his way once more as priest
And father, to the altar on
The distant hill where he had gone
A hundred times at dawn to pray,
And sacrifice the lamb, and lay
His hands upon the head of that
Poor sheep, and by its blood combat
The sin of all his sons. From where
Job stood beside the altar there
At dawn this time, he saw across
The valley to the east the loss
Of all his earthly dreams – the home
Of Zachan, like a catacomb
Upheaved and strewn from some dark cave,
And broken like an open grave
Where all his buried children lay.



His hands hung limp beside the gray,
 Blood-splattered stone. And then he knelt
 And said, "O God, what you have dealt
 Me in this murky day is not
 What I had thought this bloody, blot-
 Red stone would bring. Did I not pray
 And sacrifice my lambs, and say
 With sacred oath upon my life:
 'Far better I should take this knife
 And mingle lamb's blood with my own
 Than put my children on this stone?'
 But now what do I see below,
 But servants climbing to and fro
 Like ants on rubble foraging
 For lifeless sons.

O God, I cling
 With feeble fingers to the ledge
 Of your great grace, yet feel the wedge
 Of this calamity struck hard
 Between my chest and this deep-scarred



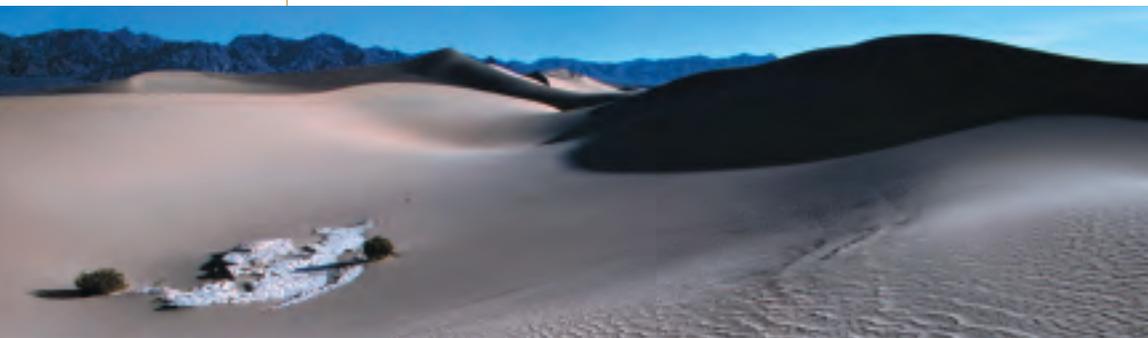
And granite precipice of love.
 But I do fear the fingers of
 My wife are not so strong, to hear
 When she comes home, that every dear
 And precious child she bore is dead.
 Therefore, O God, once more, I shed
 The blood of this lamb to atone
 For her upon my killing stone.
 I bow before you in the dust:
 Have mercy to preserve her trust.”



“They said that I would find you here.
 What’s wrong, Job? There’s an eerie fear
 On all their faces. Why are you
 Here offering today? You do
 This pri’r to Zachan’s feast, I thought.
 And that was yesterday. I brought
 Him raisins from the river vines.
 He told me they’re the only kinds
 He likes. And they won’t grow down by
 The . . .”



Dinah stopped and fixed her eye
Where Zachan's great estate had stood.
"O God . . . what in the name . . . Job, would
You please tell me what's going on!
What happened to the house? It's gone.
Where's Zachan, Job? And why were my
Three girls not waiting for me by
The gate when I came home today
The way they always do? Job, say
What you must say." Job said, "I fear
To speak what you might die to hear;
Or worse, might, hearing, live and curse.
O that I had time to rehearse
Some wise and gentle way to tell
You what we lost when that house fell."



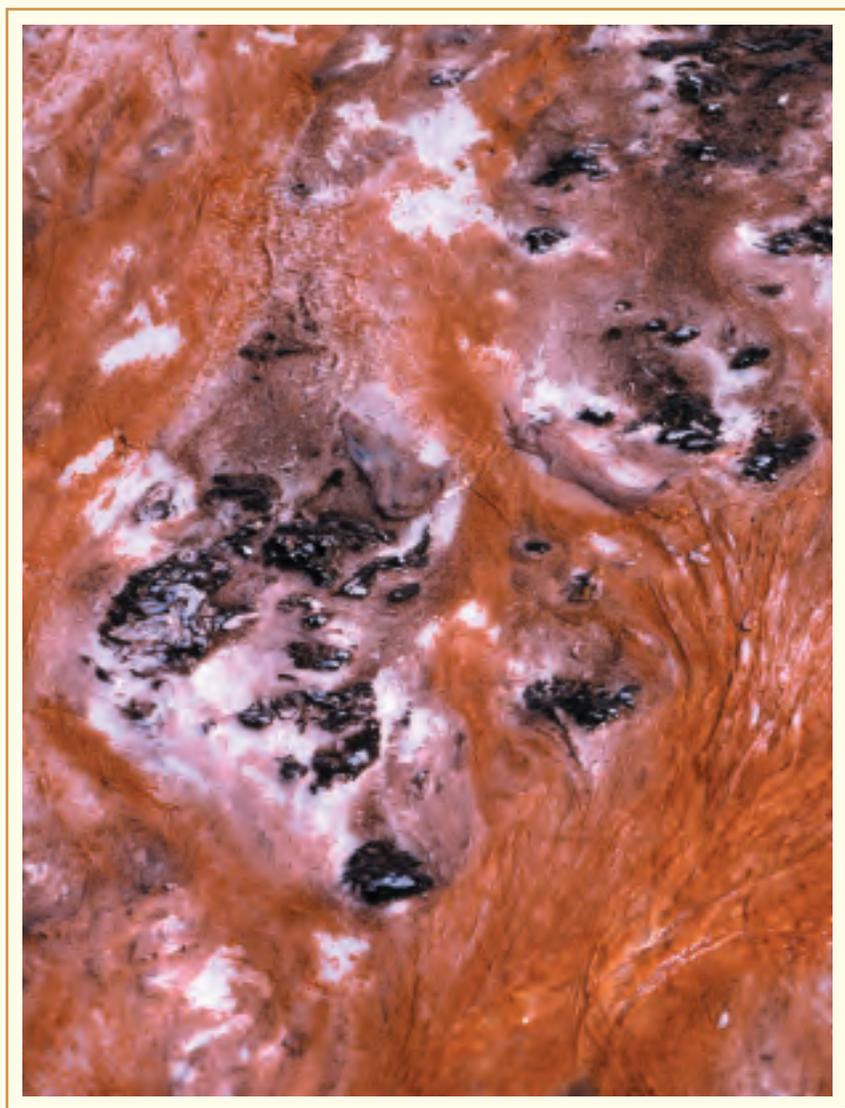
Dawn broke, blood-red along the brink
Of earth and heav'n; and scarlet ink
Spilled upwards on the gray-blue shroud
Above the land of Uz. Job bowed
His head and gave way to great sobs.
He'd seen this sky before: "It robs,"
He thought, "like some celestial thief
Who thinks to gain by bringing grief,
And stealing what he cannot use,
Unless it bless him just to bruise.
God crush you, bloody messenger
Of pain! And, by my God, leave her
Alone. If one must suffer here
Still more, pluck on this flesh, and smear
My face with gall, and take my life,
But stay, and do not touch my wife."



These were his thoughts as they embraced,
 Who knows how long. (There is no haste
 In grief.) “Job.” “Yes, Dinah?” “You know,
 It was a long, long time ago
 That you held me this way – so long
 And tight, and without sex, and strong.
 I might survive if you would stay
 And hold me like this every day.”

Job smiled and loosed his hold. But when
 He tried to look at her again,
 She gasped and pulled away. Job’s face
 Was full of sores, and every trace
 Of healthy skin was reddening
 Before her eyes. And then the sting
 Began, and itching. Soon the pus
 Was formed, and every sore was thus
 A wormy fountain of a dread
 And filthy oozing. Dinah fled,
 And left Job standing in his plague
 Alone. Within an hour one leg,





And then the other, flamed with the
Disease. The servants came to see,
And brought him food, but never got
Too close. He took the ashes hot
From off the altar where the sheep
Had burned, and rubbed them in, to keep
The itching down. And then he dashed
His pot, and with a shard he gashed
The biggest boils and let them bleed,
Like scarlet ink with earthen reed
To write his woes on parchment, gray
And ashen, like the sky.

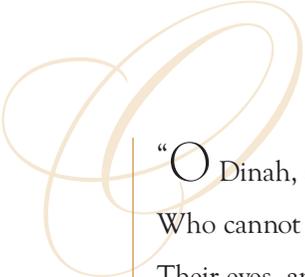


That day

Was like a hundred years. At dusk
His wife returned. And she was brusque
And cool. "Do you still cling to God?"
She asked, and saw his wordless nod.
"I think you are a fool. How much
From him will you endure till such
A love as this from God, the Great,
Is seen to be a form of hate?
Here's my advice for you to try:
Curse God, tonight, and die. And I
Will follow soon - a widow robbed
Of everything." And Dinah sobbed.
And tears ran down Job's horrid face.
He pulled himself up from his place,
And by some power of grace, he stood
Beside his wife and said, "I would,
No doubt, in your place feel the same.
But, wife, I cannot curse the name
that never treated me unfair,
And just this day has answered prayer."
"What prayer? What did you bid him do?"
"That I should bear this pain, not you."



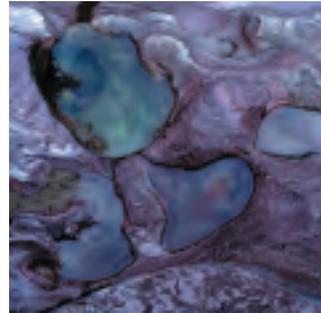




“O Dinah, do not speak like those
Who cannot see, because they close
Their eyes, and say there is no God,
Or fault him when he plies the rod.
It is no sin to say, my love,
That bliss and pain come from above.
And if we do not understand
Some dreadful stroke from his left hand,
Then we must wait and trust and see.
O Dinah, would you wait with me?”

“I’ll try,” she said, “I didn’t mean
That you should die. I’m more unclean
Than you with all your sores.” She knelt,
And found, between a boil and welt,
A place to put her kiss. “Is there
Some evidence that God could care
For such as me?”

Job touched her hair:
“You are another answered prayer.”



Sometimes the spark of faith is slight
And does not make the darkness bright.
But keep it lit and you will find:
Far better this than being blind.
One little flame when all is night,
Proves there is such a thing as Light.
Remember now the place and price
Where Jesus promised paradise.
One answered prayer when all is gone,
Will give you hope to wait for dawn.



T H I S P A I N , N O T Y O U





PART THREE

O SPARE
ME NOW,
MY FRIENDS,
YOUR PACKAGES
OF GOD



*Oh that you would keep silent,
and it would be your wisdom!*

JOB 13:5 ESV



Some days the swelling pinched his eyes
Shut, so he couldn't see the flies
That gorged their smooth black bellies in
The putrid pus that seeped like thin
And yellow sap from crimson bark
Built up with dreadful days of dark
And drying blood. Only his wife
Dared touch his cloak, and with a knife
Relieve at times some throbbing boil,
And with her own bare hands pour oil
On his malignant neck and smooth
It down along his back to soothe
His pain.



As days and weeks went by,
 The quiet news that Job might die
 Spread down to Teman and the clan
 Of Eliphaz the Wise, and ran
 Its course along the western way
 Among the Arab tribes, who say
 Their father was the ancient chief
 Named Shuah, known for proverbs, brief
 And penetrating to the soul,
 Where Bildad had his school, and stole
 The hearts of all the Shuhite men.
 The news went northward too, and when
 It reached the town of Tadmor,
 The old man Zophar wept, and wore
 His grieving robe as he set out
 To meet with Bildad on the route
 From Babylon, and then connect
 With Eliphaz - all three bedecked
 For burying their friend, if they
 Should come in time.



Eight weeks, one day,
And seven painful hours had passed
Since Job was struck. "How can I last,"
He often thought, "How can I take
One hour more and not forsake
My God?"





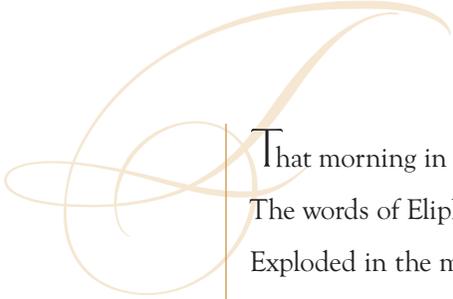
One afternoon Job raised
His pinched and swollen eyes, and praised
His God, because he saw three friends.
Job said, "O, how your coming lends
New strength to this old rotten corpse.
'Twas you, Bildad, who said, 'It warps
The mind to let it soak too long
In solitude.' Behold, no throng
Around the mighty Job, well bent,
As you would say, and had been spent
And broken too, in twain between
The loss and pain, but for my queen,
My servant queen, and mirror of
My God. But I do need and love
Your coming. Sit. And do not touch
This corpse. One, only, loves so much
As that."



Through seven days they sat,
And wept with Job, so broken that
They could not speak. Job felt the power
Of silent love, and every hour
Was like a gift.

But near the end
Of seven days a boding blend
Of gray and scarlet streaked the sky,
And Job waked with a trembling sigh:
“I’ve seen this sky before. It seeps
from some great battle in the deeps
Of angel-riven heav’n. And if
I know the signs, it means some cliff
Is in my way. O God, hold on
To me. I have no strength. This dawn
Is dark’ning over me, and I
Do fear another fall may lie
Before me in this path of pain.”





That morning in the dripping rain
The words of Eliphaz, like war,
Exploded in the mist, and tore
A chasm through the heart of Job:
“Think now, good friend, and let me probe
With you the wisdom of the wise:
Have any ears on earth, or eyes
Perceived the innocent so slain?
Or have the upright ever lain
In ashes as we see you lie,
Or suffered with such boils? Apply
What mind is left to you, and find
The cause of this great pain behind
Your seeming innocence. And seek
Your God in penitence, and keep
No longer secret all your sins.”



Job didn't move, or speak. The winds
Of such incriminations crashed
Against his stagg'ring soul and smashed
The fingers barely grasping to
The goodness of his God.

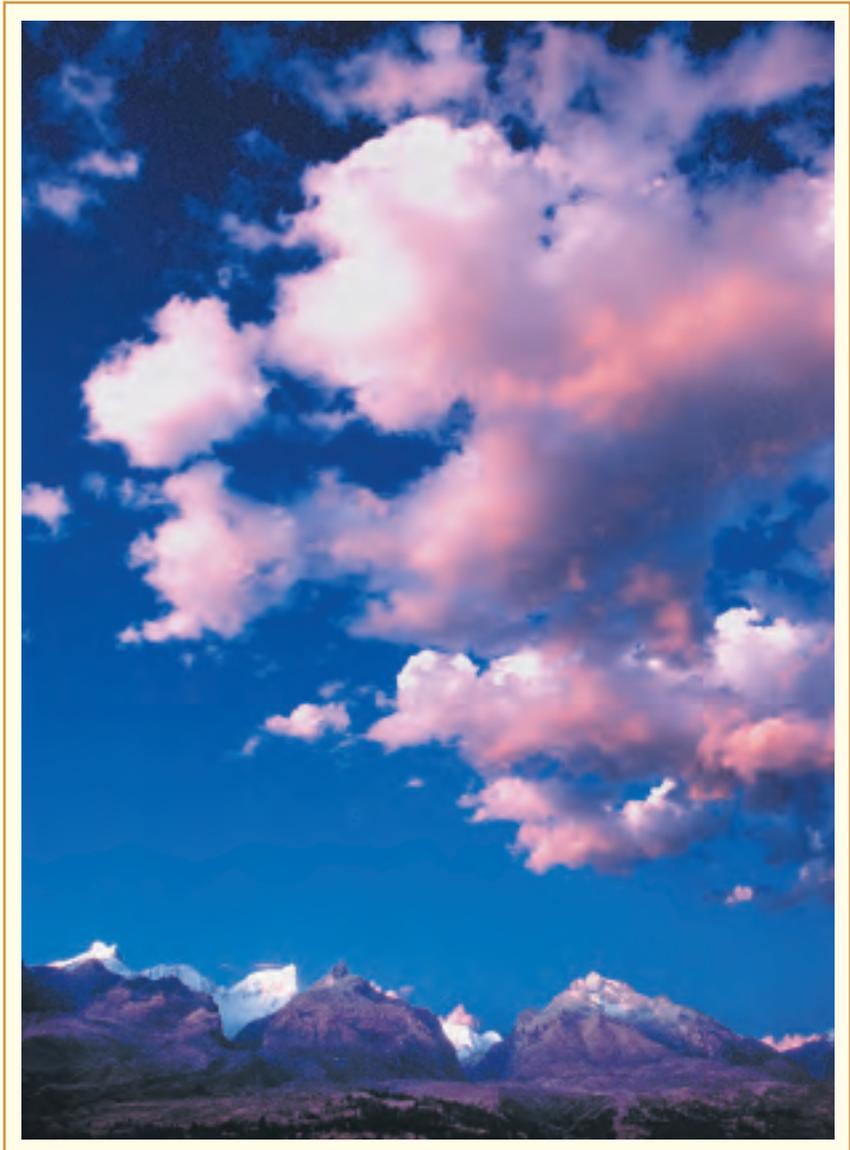
“That's true,
Great prince of Uz.” The voice belonged
To Bildad. “O, whom have you wronged,
Once-noble Job? For I have learned
A hundred proverbs, all concerned
With why calamities befall
A man. And one thread runs through all:
The righteous have a prosperous lot,
But those who curse and sin do not.
The more your sin is large or small,
The more your comforts rise and fall.
Uncover what is hidden, friend,
And there will be a happy end.”





With swollen eyes unblinking fixed
 On Bildad's face, Job felt a mixed
 Affection in his soul. "I've known
 These men for decades now. This tone,
 This thin and artificial slur
 Against my life, does not concur
 With years of empathy and love."
 Job spied the bleeding sky above,
 And pondered whence this turnabout
 Had come.

And then Zophar spoke out:
 "Remember, Job, the Lord is high
 Above the earth, and he can spy
 Iniquity in any place.
 There is no hiding sin. The face
 Of the Almighty is not veiled
 By man, nor has he ever failed
 To see and judge. Job, let your sin
 Be put away, and hide not in
 Your tents the bounty of deceit;
 And then your days will all be sweet."





Job pulled himself up on one side
 And trembling said, "How can you chide
 A blameless soul, when God, for naught,
 Has, like a wounded eagle, caught
 It in his snare and plucked it bare
 And broken both its wings? I dare
 You, friends, to demonstrate your word;
 Make known to me how I have erred.
 I am not guilty as you say.
 And should the great Almighty slay
 Me in this cage, I will with my
 Last breath protest your charge, deny
 My guilt, and call your wisdom vain.
 Clichés among the dullards! Plain
 And bright as day - to all the blind.
 Green words, unripened in the mind.
 Whence comes this cure? A crystal ball?
 Worthless physicians are you all."



Then Eliphaz set tenderness
Aside, and said, "God will not bless
A stubborn soul. How great must be
Your crime, to hide relentlessly
Behind the guise of innocent
Travail. I hear the bleak lament
Of widows that you must have mocked,
And orphans weeping that you locked
Outside your doors." Bildad joined in:
"Come, Job, what other cause but sin
Would make God crush your children there?"
He pointed to the valley where
The house of Zachan used to stand.
"You build your fragile hope on sand
If you cannot discern the hand
Of God in your demise."



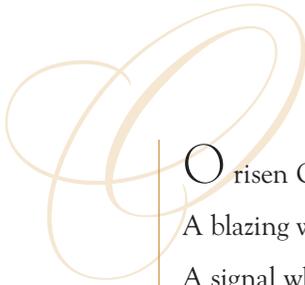


Job scanned

The faces of his friends, if there
 Might be some opening, or prayer.
 “O, I discern the hand of God,
 My friends, I grant no other rod
 The slightest countenance. What I
 Deny is not that God on high
 Makes winds to blow and lightning strike,
 But that he rules as you might like.
 I do not know why I lie here
 And you sit there. But I am clear
 It is not that I’ve sinned and you
 Are clean. Your maxims, be they few
 Or thousands, will not stand before
 The bar of God. O that some door
 Were opened to the court of God,
 And I might make my case unflawed
 Before the Judge of all the world,
 And prove this storm has not been hurled
 Against me or my children there
 Because of hidden crimes. O spare
 Me now, my friends, your packages
 Of God, your simple adages:

'Be good and strong, but weak when wrong.'
They make good rote and clever song,
But do not hold the wisdom of
Our God. A whisper from above
Is all I have. Yet from it I
Have learned through horrid nights that my
Redeemer lives, and when my skin
Has been destroyed, then from within
Shall I behold him on my side,
And I will live though I have died."





O risen Christ, shine forth and be
A blazing warning by the sea -
A signal where the sailors cling
To life through reefs of suffering,
And need the blast of light and bell:
Beware, what here beneath may dwell.
Beware of subtle, shrewd assaults,
A half-truth can be wholly false.
Beware of wisdom made in schools,
And proverbs in the mouth of fools.
Beware of claims that rise too tall:
“The upright stand and wicked fall.”
Beware the thought that all is vain;
In time God’s wisdom will be plain.







PART FOUR

UNKINDLY
HAS HE KINDLY
SHOWN ME...
GOD



*I had heard you
by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eyes see you.*

JOB 42:5 ESV



The deep blue sky above the land
Of Uz was cloudless. Stillness spanned
The circle of the earth with peace,
As if there had been made to cease
Some monumental strife unseen
Beyond the blue and arching screen
Of heav'n - a great inverted sea,
White-capped from some deep anarchy,
As though a wild Leviathan
Thrashed down its dirt to dim the sun
And bloody every morning sky,
But now a calm as far as eye
Could see, a silent azure pool
Of massive space above the cool
And restful evening, without pain,
Or any red and boding stain
Up-bleeding from the sutures of
The distant soil and sky above
The land of Uz.





Job felt the breeze
 Against his healthy skin. “To seize
 This moment would, I think, be here
 An ample recompense. One year
 Of misery, he thought, is not
 Too long, to see of heaven what
 I’ve seen, and watch the pow’r to heal,
 And loving, feel what I now feel.
 Unless perhaps six years have made
 The recollected pain to fade,
 And turn the memory of dread
 Into a noble cause, and shred
 The fabric of reality
 And truth beyond identity.”

He looked across the fields of wheat,
 And endless rolling hills of sweet
 Green pasturelands for all his herds
 And flocks, and thought, “There are no words
 To speak the substance of my soul
 And joy to God, nor yet extol

His worth above the vast rebirth
Of all my dreams. No dancing mirth
Can suit or satisfy the kind
Of tearful pleasure that I find
When I recall what I have lost
By his decree, and what it cost
To see my God.” He looked down at
The glowing little girl who sat
Before him on the grass – the first
Child born to Dinah since she nursed
The dead. Job wondered if there might
Be more in years to come despite
The treasure that Jemimah was.
He’d sometimes walk the hills of Uz
Alone, and lift his hands and break
Out singing that the Lord could make
A little girl like this from bone
And flesh that once could only groan
And grieve the loss of every child.



The little girl looked up and smiled:
 “What are you thinking, Papa?” Job
 Thought for a while, then said, “You probe
 Perhaps, Jemimah, where the road
 Is rougher and the mental load
 Too heavy for your little mind.”
 “I like it, Papa, when you find
 A story you can tell about
 Your life. Why were you sick?” “I doubt
 That you would understand,” he said.
 “Do you?” she asked. “Your little head
 May not perhaps grasp all the Why,
 But it may do us good to try.

“Your daddy, once, was very rich.
 And you had three big sisters which
 I loved with all my heart. They died
 With seven brothers all inside
 A great big house that fell because
 A giant wind broke all the laws
 We thought we knew. How little did



We know! And then one day amid
 The grief I got so sick no one
 Could tell that it was me. I'd done
 All that I knew to do. But still
 It came and vexed my soul until
 I almost lost my faith."



"Do you
 Think God made you so sick?" She drew
 Her breath, and swallowed hard. "I know
 You'd like to think that there's a foe
 That hurts and God that heals. And that
 Would not be wrong; but I have sat
 And pondered months in pain to see
 If that is true - if misery
 Is Satan's work, and happiness
 Is God's. Jemimah, we must bless
 The Lord for all that's good and bad."

But, Papa, God's not mean or mad.
 He's not our enemy. He's kind
 And gentle, isn't he?"

“Your mind
 Is right, Jemimah, but it’s small.
 He’s gentle, kind, but that’s not all.
 I have some friends who thought they knew
 The mind of God, and that their view
 Of tenderness exhausted God’s,
 And that severity and rods
 Could only be explained with blame,
 To vindicate his holy name.”

“So you think it was God who made
 You sick?”

“I think God never laid
 Aside the reins that lie against
 The neck of Satan, nor unfenced
 His pen to run at liberty,
 But only by the Lord’s decree.”



“So you think God was kind to make
You sick,” Jemimah asked, “and take
Away your health and all your sons
And friends, and daughters - all the ones
You loved?”

“Jemimah, what I think
Is this: The Lord has made me drink
The cup of his severity
That he might kindly show to me
What I would be when only he
Remains in my calamity.
Unkindly he has kindly shown
That he was not my hope alone.”

“O, Papa, do you mean your friends
Were right?”



“No, no, my child, to cleanse
An upright heart of toxic stains
With searing irons is not like chains
Laid on the soul in penalty
For guile and crimes no one can see.
No, they were wrong. And kindly has
The Lord rebuked good Eliphaz,
And I have prayed for him, and all
Is well. You see, their minds were small,
And they could not see painful times
Apart from dark and hidden crimes.
Beware, Jemimah, God is kind,
In ways that will not fit your mind.
It’s getting late, Jemimah, come,
I think I hear the bedtime drum.
My little theologian deep,
It’s time to say good night and sleep.”

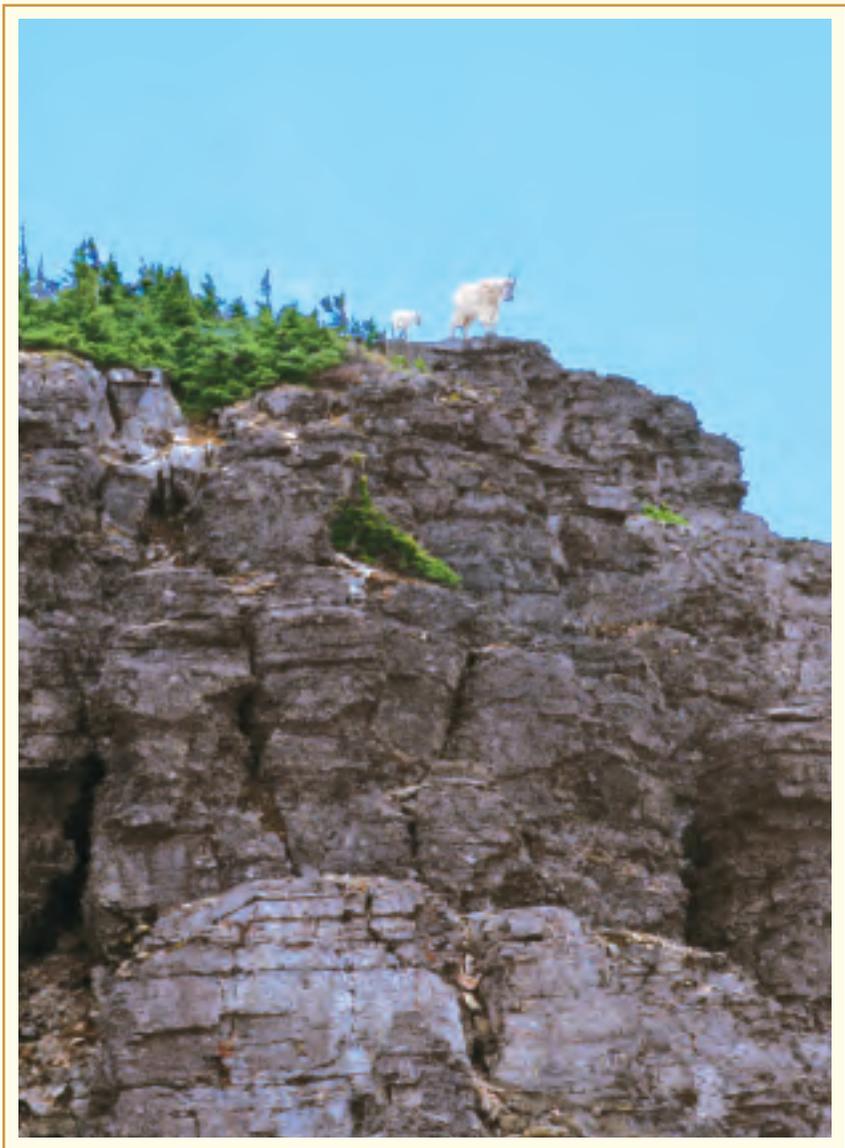


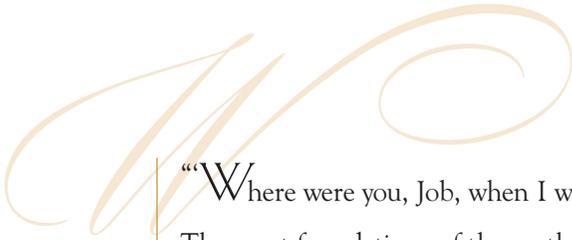
“But, Papa, please, one more: would you
Tell me about the wind that blew –
About the whirlwind and the word
Of God. You told me once you heard
The very voice of God. What did
He say?”



“He said, ‘There’s giant squid
Beneath the sea you’ve never seen,
And mountain goats above the green
Tree line that bring forth kids on cliffs
So high and steep that little whiffs
Of wind would make a human fall.’
God asked me, ‘Is the wild ox all
At your command? And will he stay
The night beside your crib and play
Or work with you on leashes made
Of hemp? And have the horses brayed
At your command, and do you make
Them leap like locusts? Do they break
Through shield and chariot because
You formed their neck? What ancient laws
Of flight have you designed for hawks?
Have you devised the way he walks
On wind and snatches up his prey
In flight? And could you ever play
With stars to loose Orion, seize
The distant chains of Pleiades?’



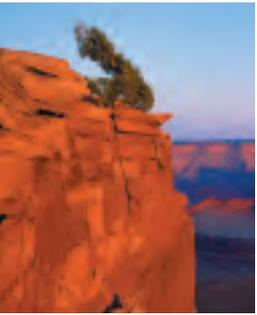




“Where were you, Job, when I with mirth
 The great foundations of the earth
 Did lay, and all the sons of God
 Rejoiced to watch a formless clod
 Become the habitation of
 My bride? Did you once brood above
 The waters and appoint their bounds?
 And have you joined the King who crowns
 The mammoth sky with morning light?”

“Come, Job, gird up your feeble might
 And make your case against the Lord.
 Do you know where the snow is stored
 Or how I make the hail and rain,
 Or how a buried seed bears grain,
 How ravens find their food at night
 And lilies clothe themselves with white?”

“And finally, my servant, Job,
 Can you draw down and then disrobe
 Leviathan, the king of all



The sons of pride, and in his fall
 Strip off his camouflage of strength,
 And make him over all the length
 Of earth and heav'n to serve the plan
 Of humble righteousness? I can.
 I make Leviathan my rod.
 Beloved Job, behold your God!"



“And what did you say, Papa, when
 The Lord was done?” “I said, ‘Amen,’
 And bowed as low as I could bow.
 Come here, my lass, I’ll show you how.”

And when she crouched before his feet
 He picked her up, and with a sweet
 And tender grip he said, “Watch this.”
 And on her cheek he put a kiss.



Behold the mercy of our King,
Who takes from death its bitter sting,
And by his blood, and often ours,
Brings triumph out of hostile pow'rs,
And paints, with crimson, earth and soul
Until the bloody work is whole.
What we have lost God will restore -
That, and himself, forevermore,
When he is finished with his art:
The quiet worship of our heart.
When God creates a humble hush,
And makes Leviathan his brush,
It won't be long before the rod
Becomes the tender kiss of God.





“I came with nothing from the womb,

I go with nothing to the tomb.

God gave me children freely, then

He took them to himself again.

At last I taste the bitter rod,

My wise and ever blessed God.”

