

In yesterday's post I summarized the narrative of Job (the story that frames the book, chs. 1-2 and 42, which come from a different author from the poetic dialogues of Job and his "friends" of chs. 3-41), with a few words about its view of why a good person might suffer. Life's miseries could be a test from God to see if a person will remain faithful, not just when he is thriving but also when he is in the midst of dire hardship. Does this person worship God for what he can get out of it (wealth, prestige, stature) or because God deserves to be worshiped no matter what?

When I was a Christian I was drawn to this story and thought that it taught a valuable lesson. It was important to be faithful, even when times were hard. Suffering might simply be a test to see if I truly loved God and wanted to serve him, no matter what.

I no longer see the story that way, but instead find it disturbing on several levels. To begin with, the whole premise seems to me both ludicrous and offensive. Would the Almighty Creator of all really sanction the destruction of a person's life - destroying all his possessions, murdering his children, and inflicting him with horrible disease - just to see if he could make him curse rather than bless Him? Would God make a wager with another divine being about whether a sufferer can be made to reject and despise him? Would God inflict horrible suffering (or sanction another being to do it) just in order to win a bet?

I find one particular detail in the story even more problematic and upsetting: the view of ...

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