JOB: TRIAL BY ORDEAL
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Prelude

(Pierre de la Rue
Missa de Sancto Job, c. 1510)
NARRATOR. A man lived in Ausis, called Job. He was true-hearted, blameless, upright and devout, shunning evil, the noblest man in all the East.
One day the angels of God came and stood before the Lord, and the Devil also.
And the Lord said to the Devil:
LORD. Where have you come from?

DEVIL. From going round the earth, and walking about the world.
LORD. Have you noticed my servant Job?
There is no one else like him, he is blameless,
true-hearted and devout, shunning evil.
DEVIL. Does Job worship the Lord for nothing? You protect him and have made him rich.
But put your hand on his belongings,
then see him praise you.
LORD. All that he has, I put in your power, but do not touch the man himself.
NARRATOR. So the Devil left the Lord’s presence. One day, Job’s sons and daughters were drinking in their eldest brother’s house. And a messenger came to Job and said:
FIRST MESSENGER. Your oxen were ploughing, and your donkeys grazing nearby; they were stolen, and your servants killed. I alone escaped and have come to tell you.
NARRATOR. While he spoke, another messenger came, and said:
SECOND MESSENGER. Fire fell from heaven and burned your sheep, and the shepherds. I alone escaped and have come to tell you.
NARRATOR. While he spoke, a third messenger came, and said:
THIRD MESSENGER. Three bands of horsemen attacked us, stole the camels and killed the servants. I alone escaped and have come to tell you.
NARRATOR. While he spoke, a fourth messenger came, and said:
FOURTH MESSENGER. While your sons and daughters were feasting in their eldest brother’s house, a great wind came from the desert, and destroyed the house. All your children are dead, I alone escaped and have come to tell you.
NARRATOR. Then Job rose and tore his garments, shaved his head, fell to the ground, and worshipped.
JOB. Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. It happened according to his will. Blessed be the name of the Lord.
NARRATOR. In all this, Job did not sin in the Lord’s sight, and did not challenge God’s wisdom.
One day the angels of God came and stood before the Lord, and the Devil also.
LORD. Where have you come from?
DEVIL. From going round the earth, and walking about the world.
LORD. Have you noticed my servant Job?
He is virtuous, true-hearted and devout, shunning evil, and steadfastly innocent.
DEVIL. Skin for skin! A man will pay anything to save his own life. But put your hand on his body: then see him praise you.
LORD. I put him in your power: but spare his life.
NARRATOR. So the Devil left the Lord’s presence, and tormented Job with boils from head to foot. He scraped off the pus with a potsherd, and sat on a dung-heap outside the city.

And after a long time his wife said:
WIFE. How long will you hold out, waiting in hope for deliverance? All memory of you has vanished from the earth, even your children whom I bore with pain, for nothing.
You sleep outside among worms and decay,
and I am a homeless drudge,
waiting for the night to bring me rest.
Curse the Lord, and die.
JOB. You foolish woman! If the Lord sends us good things, must we not bear the bad things too?
NARRATOR. In all this, Job spoke no ill of God.
JOB: TRIAL BY ORDEAL

Scene 1

(Pierre de la Rue
Missa de Sancto Job, c. 1510)
Now three friends came, who heard of his plight:
Eliphaz, king of the Thaemans;
Baldad, sovereign of the Saucheans;
and Sophar, king of the Minaeans.
They came to sympathise and comfort him.
When they first saw him from a distance, they did not recognise him.
They wept, tore their garments, scattered dust on their heads; and they sat beside him seven days and seven nights, without speaking, for they saw his terrible suffering.
Then Job cursed the day he was born.
JOB. A curse on the day I was born and the night when they said, ‘The child is a boy.’
Dark be that night and let God not see it. Let it be struck from the days of the year.
Let that night have no stars, and let no dawn come to it, because it did not close my mother’s womb and spare me the sight of sorrow.
Why is light given to those in bitterness, and life to souls who grieve?
Scene 2

(Pierre de la Rue
*Missa de Sancto Job*, c. 1510)
ELIPHAZ. Who will withstand the violence of your complaint?
You have often encouraged others in pain, but now you suffer, and are crushed.
But if you spoke the truth, none of this would have happened.
Did not my ear receive strange news?
As when terror falls upon men, with dread and a sound in the night, horror seized me and shook my bones.
A spirit appeared, my hair and flesh quivered, but when I rose I could not see it. But I heard a breath and a voice: ‘Is any man blameless in the Lord’s sight?’
But I shall pray to the Lord, who works great wonders. The Lord’s reproach is a blessing, do not spurn the reproof of the Almighty.
He hurts and heals, and will deliver you time and time again, and protect you in famine and in battle.
JOB. The arrows of the Lord are in my flesh, thirsty for my blood. How can I endure? Am I made of stone? Did I not trust in him? But he does not help me.
Is not mortal life an unending trial?
I lie down longing for day, and rise
only to long for night. Day and night
are full of suffering.
There is no return from death, no going home.
So I shall speak my anguish,
and the bitterness of my soul.
I shall not live and endure for ever.
Let me die, my life is empty.
What is man, that you make much of him?
Will you keep a watch upon him till dawn
and judge him till the time of rest?
Will you neither leave me alone nor goad me until I swallow my spit? If I have sinned what can I do to meet your demands, who know men’s minds? Why have you turned me into your accuser? Why am I a burden to you?
Why cannot I forget my fault, and purify my sin?  
Now I go down into the earth, soon I shall be no more.
BALDAD. How long will you go on like this? Is the Lord unjust, the Creator a perverse judge?
Pray to the Lord: if you are pure and true he will listen, and restore you to righteousness.
Ask older generations, for we are newcomers, our life a mere shadow. Will they not teach you?
Can the reed grow without water?
Or any green plant without moisture?
So it is with those who forget the Lord; the hope of the ungodly will wither. His house will be deserted, his tent as frail as a spider’s web. No props will make his house stand firm.
The Lord will care for the good man
but spurn the ungodly.
He will make the true-hearted laugh
And give them cause to praise him.
But their enemies will be clothed in shame and their dwellings will be destroyed.
JOB. How can a just man stand firm before the Lord?
If he chooses to argue with him,
The Lord will not answer his questions.
He is wise and strong. Who can withstand him?
He wears away mountains and overturns them in anger; he shakes the earth, so its pillars totter; he commands the sun not to rise, and darkens the stars.
He spread out the heavens, and walks on the sea; he made the Pleiades, Hesperus, Arcturus, and the chambers of the south.
He does great and mysterious things, glorious, excellent, and beyond number.
If only he would hear me, judge my cause.
I am righteous, but he will not listen
though I beg for his judgment.
If I call on him, and hear no reply,
I cannot believe that he has heard my voice.
He is mighty: who can resist his judgment? For though I am righteous, my words sound profane. Though blameless, I shall be found guilty.
If I am wicked, why have I not died? Whatever I may do to cleanse myself, you plunge me in filth.
You are not a man like me
with whom I could stand up in court.
If only we had a mediator who could judge between us.
Let God take his rod from my back, and not make me dizzy with fear. I will not fear, but shall speak out.
I shall speak out my misery, trapped as I am in bitterness of spirit.
I shall say to the Lord:
Do not teach me impiety.
Why have you judged me thus?
Do you want me to be impious?
You have disowned your own creature
and listened to the wicked.
Do you see as a mortal sees?
Is your life like that of a man?
Is that why you seek out my sins?
You know I am guiltless,
but who can escape from your hands?
You moulded and made me: will you now destroy me? You shaped me like clay: now you make me dust again
You poured me out like milk,
to be curdled like cheese. You clothed me
in skin and flesh, bones and sinews.
You gave me life and showed me mercy, and you watched over my spirit.
I know you are all-powerful.
If I sinned, you would see and condemn.
Even if I am upright, I cannot be proud, for I am full of shame.
Why did you let me be born?
Better if I had died, never been seen,
as if I had never existed,
taken straight from womb to grave.
Is not my life short? Give me some rest before I go into the dark for ever, the place of everlasting night.
SOPHAR. The man who talks a lot should hear the other side.
Do not say, ‘I am pure in his sight’.
But oh! may the Lord speak to you!
Then you will know you are being punished for your sins.
Can you probe the ways of the Creator? or reach the limits of what he has made? Heaven is high: what do you know of its height? There are things deeper than Hell: what do you know of them?
He knows the deeds of evil men
and will not overlook a sin.
If you do any wrong, cast it away,
do not let unrighteousness dwell with you.
Then your face will shine like clear water, you will shed all impurity and fear. You will forget your misery, as if it were a wave that had passed by.
Scene 3

(Pierre de la Rue
Missa de Sancto Job, c. 1510)
JOB. Though the Almighty pursue me, I will plead before him, and this will help my cause. No one can lie to him.
Hear me, hear my words. I know when you have heard me you will acquit me.
Grant me two things, and I shall stand up before you: do not strike me, and do not make me fear you.
Then summon me, and I shall answer,
or speak, and I shall make reply.
How many are my crimes and sins?
Tell me what they are.
For who is completely pure? No one!
Stand away from man. Let him have peace and pleasure, if no more than a labourer.
Cut a tree down, it may still flower again. Though its root grow old and its stem die, a breath of moisture will revive it and it will fruit like a new tree.
In course of time, seas shrink, rivers run dry: but when a man sleeps, he will not wake till the heavens are dissolved.
If only you would keep me safe in the grave
until your anger passed
and only then remember me!
When a man dies, the days of his life are ended. Shall I wait till I am born again?
Call me and I will listen, but do not reject me, whom you made.
But now you count my actions one by one and no fault escapes your eye. You keep all my faults in a bag and my wickedness under seal.
A mountain falls and is swept away, rocks decay and are dislodged, water wears away stone: so you have destroyed man’s power to endure.
You pursue him to the end, and at last he is gone.
You set your face against him
and dismiss him.
He may have many children, or few, and not know it. But his body suffered, and his spirit mourned.
ELIPHAZ. Would a wise man use such shallow arguments, and empty words?
The words of your own mouth accuse you
your lips testify against you.
What? Were you the first man to be born?
Did you hear the Lord’s decisions?
Are you God’s advisor? Is wisdom given to you alone?
Is your wickedness not great, your faults too many to be counted?
Be steadfast, and you will prosper. If you turn to the Lord and remove evildoing from your house,
then the Almighty will save you from enemies, and make you like silver tried in the fire.
JOB. I have heard many such things. You are all poor comforters. What use are empty words?
My days pass in meaningless noise,
my heartstrings are broken,
my nights are turned to day,
my mornings are darkened.
If I remain the grave will be my house
and my couch will be spread in the darkness.
Death I have called ‘father’
and Decay my ‘mother’ or ‘sister’.
Where then will my hopes be?
Where shall I see my reward?
Can I take them down to Hell with me?
Shall we go down together to the grave?
BALDAD. How long will you go on like this? Stop. Let *us* have a chance.
You’ve given in to anger.
What? If you die, will the earth be uninhabited?
Will the mountains be uprooted?
The light of the ungodly will be extinguished, his lamp will die with him.
He will be forgotten by his kinsfolk, his house will disappear. Strangers will take his possessions.
That is the fate of the ungodly
and of those who do not know the Lord.
JOB. How long will you provoke me?
Know only that this is the Lord’s doing.
I have said things I should not, using the wrong words at the wrong time.
I cannot escape,
he has covered me in darkness.
He has stripped me of all honour
and taken the crown from my head.
He has cut down my hope like a tree.
His ordeals came upon me like an army all at once,
my paths are beset with ambushes.
My kinsmen and friends shun me,
all who see me hate me,
those I love reject me.
Pity me, pity me, friends, 
for the hand of the Lord has touched me.
Why do you persecute me as the Lord does?
Are you not satisfied with my flesh?
I wish my words were written in a book or carved in rock!
But I know he is eternal, 
the one who will set me free, 
who will raise my body so that 
I no longer suffer these things.
I know this in my own heart
and have seen it with my own eyes.
When I remember I am filled with horror.
Why do the ungodly thrive?
They see their children flourishing.
Their households are rich, they have no fear, the Lord does not scourge them.
Their children play before them
on psaltery and harp,
and they rejoice in the music.
They live amid good things and die in peace.
They say to the Lord, ‘Leave us alone, we do not want to know your ways. Why should we serve the Almighty or seek his favour?’
Their wealth is in their own hands,
the Lord averts his gaze from their works.
SOPHAR. I did not expect this answer. You understand no more than I do.
Have you not always known these things?
The mirth of the ungodly is short-lived though his gifts rise up to heaven.
For just when he seems secure
he will be swept away. People will ask,
‘Where has he gone?’ He will disappear
like a dream in the night.
He will never be seen again in his former place.
Scene 4

(Pierre de la Rue
*Missa de Sancto Job*, c. 1510)
JOB. If only I were back in the old days, when God watched over me and lit my path; when God took care of my house.
I had many children, my path flowed with butter, the mountains poured out milk.
In the city, a seat was placed for me.
Young men withdrew, old men stood up, great men were silent.
Those who heard me blessed me, and kept silent before me.
I rescued the poor from the hands of the powerful, I helped the fatherless, defenceless people and widows blessed me.
I clothed myself in righteousness,
I was eyes to the blind, feet to the lame,
I was the father of the weak,
I took up the stranger’s cause.
I broke the teeth of the ungodly and snatched away his prey.
I thought, ‘I shall live like a strong tree for a long time, my roots spread out to the water, the dew on my branches.’
Men heeded me, waited for me to speak, and then were silent. They were like thirsty soil waiting for rain until I spoke.
Now I am scorned by younger men.
I am beset by thieves, wild cave-dwellers, sons of fools, vile, dishonoured outcasts.
Now they taunt me, my name is a by-word. They hate me, shun me, spit in my face.
My pains return, hopes are blown away,
my life ebbs, my days are misery,
at night my bones ache, my sinews are weak.
God has reduced me to clay,
my wealth to dust and ashes.
I cry out to you, God, but you are deaf.
You abandon me and scourge me, plunge me in grief and danger.
I know that death will destroy me, as must happen to all mortals.
I wish I could kill myself, 
or ask someone to do it for me.
I had pity on every needy man,
but evil came when I looked for good.
My harp is tuned for mourning,
my song is lamentation.
NARRATOR. The three friends gave up answering Job, for he seemed to them to be righteous.
Scene 5

(Pierre de la Rue
Missa de Sancto Job, c. 1510)
NARRATOR.
But Elious from Ausis was angry with Job for justifying himself before God.
And he was angry with Job’s friends because they had not answered Job, and yet condemned him as irreverent.
ELIOUS. I am younger than you, so I held back. I thought, ‘It is not age that speaks, but the spirit within. The Almighty gives wisdom, and not only to the old.’
Hear me, I will tell you what I know.
Answer me if you can,
let each of us stand up to the other.
I heard you say: ‘I am innocent yet God has accused me and counts me as his adversary.'
‘He has put my feet in the stocks and watches everything I do.’
How can you say you are a just man?
The Eternal one is greater than any mortal.
You say: ‘Why does he not hear my cause?’
But at one time the Lord speaks directly,
at another time in dreams,
frightening men in their sleep.
Then he makes them understand
and fills them with terror.
To turn someone aside from evil and pride, God may protect him and keep him alive.
Or he may inflict illness and pain, make the man unable to eat so he is a living skeleton and close to death.
Yet if a thousand messengers of death stand round him, not one can harm him if he resolves to turn to the Lord and admit his sins and follies.
God will save him and restore his body, like a newly plastered wall, and fill his bones with marrow.
His flesh will be like that of a child and his strength will be restored.
He will pray to the Lord, the Lord will hear, admit him, joyful, to his presence, and give him justice.
And the man will say, ‘How greatly I sinned!
I have not been punished enough!
Save my soul from destruction,
and my life shall see light.’
These are the three ways in which the Mighty One deals with man.
He has delivered my soul from death,
so that my life may praise him in the light.
So hear me, you wise of heart:
may I never sin before the Lord.
For truly he treats men as each deserves, and he tracks everyone down.
The Mighty One’s strength will prevail for he is supreme. Who can challenge his ways or say he has been unjust?
The Mighty One is great, we cannot know him. His days are without number.
Listen, Job: stop and wonder at the works of the Lord, and how he has ordered them, making light in the darkness.
But the light is not visible to all, shining from afar as if behind clouds. Then a north wind clears the clouds and a golden glow appears, displaying the glory of the Almighty.
None can equal him in power.
Men revere him, and the wise of heart fear him.
Scene 6

(Pierre de la Rue
*Missa de Sancto Job*, c. 1510)
NARRATOR. The Lord spoke to Job through whirlwind and clouds:
LORD. Who is this man, trying to hide his thoughts from me? Gird your loins and answer my questions.
Where were you when I built the earth?
Speak, if you know how it was made,
who measured it, who laid its cornerstone?
When I made the stars, my angels praised me; and I enclosed the sea behind gates when it rushed forth at its birth.
I clothed it in cloud and wrapped it in mist, and fixed its shores, telling it: ‘Thus far may you come, and no farther.’
Have you found the source of the sea,
or trodden the tracks of the deep?
Do the gates of death open for you,
the doorkeepers shrinking back before you?
Can you tell me the extent of the earth, where there is light and where darkness? Can you show me their boundaries and paths? I am sure you were born then and have a great lifespan!
Have you been to where I store snow and hail?
Have you your own supply,
against the day of battle?
Where does frost come from, or how does the south wind blow through the world?
Who prepared paths for heavy rain
and thunder, to rain on wilderness
and feed untrodden land, so it grows green?
Did you bind the Pleiades or loosen
Orion’s belt? Do you know the movements
of Mazuroth or of the evening star?
Who has let the wild ass run free?
I have placed it in the wilderness
and the salt lands.
It scorns the city
and knows nothing of the tax-gatherer.
It roams the hills for pasture,
looking for everything green.
Did you make the horse strong and clothe his neck with terror?
Bows and swords bounce off him, his rage devours the ground.
He will do nothing
till he hears the trumpets and says ‘Aha!’,
prancing and neighing as he smells war.
Do you teach the hawk to glide
with spread wings towards the south?
Do you tell the eagle to soar, or the vulture to sit on his lofty, hidden nest? From there he searches far off for food for his bloodthirsty chicks. Wherever there is carrion, they will be there.
JOB. Why do I still argue? Being rebuked, how can I reply? I shall cover my mouth with my hand and shall not speak again.
Scene 7

(Pierre de la Rue
*Missa de Sancto Job*, c. 1510)
LORD. No, gird your loins like a man, answer me. Do not dismiss my judgment. Do you think I have done anything except to prove that you are upright?
Have you an arm like the Lord’s? Can you thunder with a voice like his?
Array yourself in pride and power, honour and glory. Send out messengers to humble the haughty.
Crush the wicked, and disgrace them. Do this, and I will admit you can save yourself.
Look at the wildness of the beasts around you, even though they eat grass like cattle. Look at this one, with his strong back and belly.
His tail is like a cypress, his sinews tightly knit, his ribs like bronze, his backbone like iron.
This is the chief of the Lord’s creation,
a fit plaything for his angels.
He lies in the shade of trees, bushes, and reeds of every kind. No flood troubles him, he would readily swallow the Jordan in spate.
Can you catch the dragon with a fishhook?
Can you fasten a strap round his snout?
Will he plead gently with you, or make a covenant to serve you for ever?
Will you play with him like a pet bird, or bind him like a sparrow for your children?
Who can uncover his face
or open his breastplate
or part his fearsome jaws to see his teeth?
He sneezes out showers of light,
his eyes shine like the morning star.
From his mouth come flames and sparks, blazing torches, and smoke as from a coal fire.
His breath is like coals, flames come from his throat.
Power is in his neck, he spreads destruction.
He makes the deep boil like a cauldron,  
stirs it like ointment in a pot.  
He takes the sea captive and regards  
its depths as a good place to take a stroll.
He sees every high thing, and is king of all creatures in the waters.
JOB. I know you can do everything, nothing is impossible for you.
Who can hide his thoughts from you?
Who but you can tell me wonderful things
which I did not know or understand?
I had heard about you before, but now I have seen you.
Now I count myself as nothing,
I faint, I am dust and ashes.
Epilogue

(Pierre de la Rue
Missa de Sancto Job, c. 1510)
NARRATOR. When the Lord had said all this to Job, he spoke to Eliphaz of Teman:
LORD. You and your two friends have sinned. You did not speak the truth like my servant Job.
Now take seven calves and seven rams, go to my servant Job and he will make the offering and pray for you. For his sake, I will not destroy you, though you did not speak the truth about me.
NARRATOR. So Eliphaz the Thæmanite, Baldad the Sauchite, and Sophar the Minæan did as the Lord commanded.
The Lord restored Job’s wealth, and pardoned his friends when Job prayed for them;
and he made Job twice as rich as before.
Job lived another hundred and seventy years, and reached the age of two hundred and forty. He saw his sons, and his sons’ sons, to the fourth generation.
And Job died an old man, full of days.
ΤΕΛΟΣ