"THE SKIES WILL UNCOVER HIS INIQUITY": SATIRE IN THE SECOND SPEECH OF ZOPHAR (JOB XX)

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The following analysis of Job xx seeks to demonstrate three theses:

1) Zophar is specifically answering the speech of Job in chapter xix (as well as several earlier speeches of Job) 1).

2) Zophar's reply provides additional and powerful proof that Job's cries for an "umpire" (ix 33), a "witness" (xvi 19), and a "vindicator" (xix 25) are not cries for God but for a third party in the dispute 2).

3) Satire is the key to a proper understanding of the relationships between the speeches of Job and the speeches of the friends.

Let us turn to the last problem first, because the other two must be seen in its light: it is essential to define carefully the meaning of satire, as that word will be used in this article. "Satire is militant irony", writes Northrop Frye (Anatomy of Criticism [Princeton, 1957], p. 224). Going on to distinguish the two terms, irony and satire, he states:

Irony is consistent both with complete realism of content and with the suppression of attitude on the part of the author. Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience (p. 224).

One can conclude from this distinction that irony is best characterized by ambiguity of intention on the part of the author. For example, at Saul's public coronation ceremony at Mizpah (1 Sam. x 17-27), Samuel proclaims Saul king with these words:

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2) Further bibliographical references will be provided in the context of a discussion of this problem below, but it is instructive to note that the most recent commentary, that of Robert Gordis, The Book of Job (New York, 1978), once again insists that Job does not have any third figure in view at any of those places; cf. pp. 526-9.
Do you see whom the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people! (1 Sam. x 24).

At face value, this could be a rousing call to unite behind the tall and handsome warrior from Benjamin. But given Samuel's earlier anti-kingship sentiments (1 Sam. viii, and in this very scene 1 Sam. x 18-19), and in view of the fact that the newly-minted monarch has just been dragged out of the baggage to be crowned before his subjects (1 Sam. x 22), Samuel's words might just as well be laced with sarcasm. We might paraphrase it as follows:

Do you see whom the Lord has picked? My God! There is no one like this oversized bumbler in all Israel!

The author's intention is certainly ambiguous here, and the irony resonates between the anti- and pro-monarchical poles of the entire story of Saul.

In contrast to this ambiguity, satire is more overt, more direct in style and intention. Some object is definitely under attack. Thus, Frye suggests that there are two essentials to literary satire. First, the wit and humor are founded on fantasy or on a sense of the grotesque or absurd. Second, there is an unambiguous object of the attack.

Leonard Feinberg has written a readable introduction to the subject which can serve to sharpen our definition further: Introduction to Satire (Ames, 1967). Like Frye, he emphasizes the hyperbolic quality of satire:

The satirist, then, has to exaggerate because he is facing a formidable opposition: an audience indifferent to expression of unpleasant truths... (p. 14).

Also like Frye, Feinberg discusses the clear object of satire's attack and comments helpfully on the kind of object often chosen. "The excesses (which are always found in satire) that we laugh at are usually inferior excesses; the fat man, not the strong man..." (p. 6).

Great villains have always been hard to ridicule. They may be horrible but they are not entertaining. When he (the object of satire) tries to seem noble, he invites satiric treatment. By pretending to be something he is not, he becomes a hypocrite; and hypocrisy is an inferiority that we can laugh at, feel contempt for, and enjoy (p. 30).

Thus, we can see that the object of satire must be reduced to laughable proportions in order that the satire can perform at its best, engendering laughter from the reader who is thereby offered "the pleasures of superiority and a safe release of aggression" (p. 5).