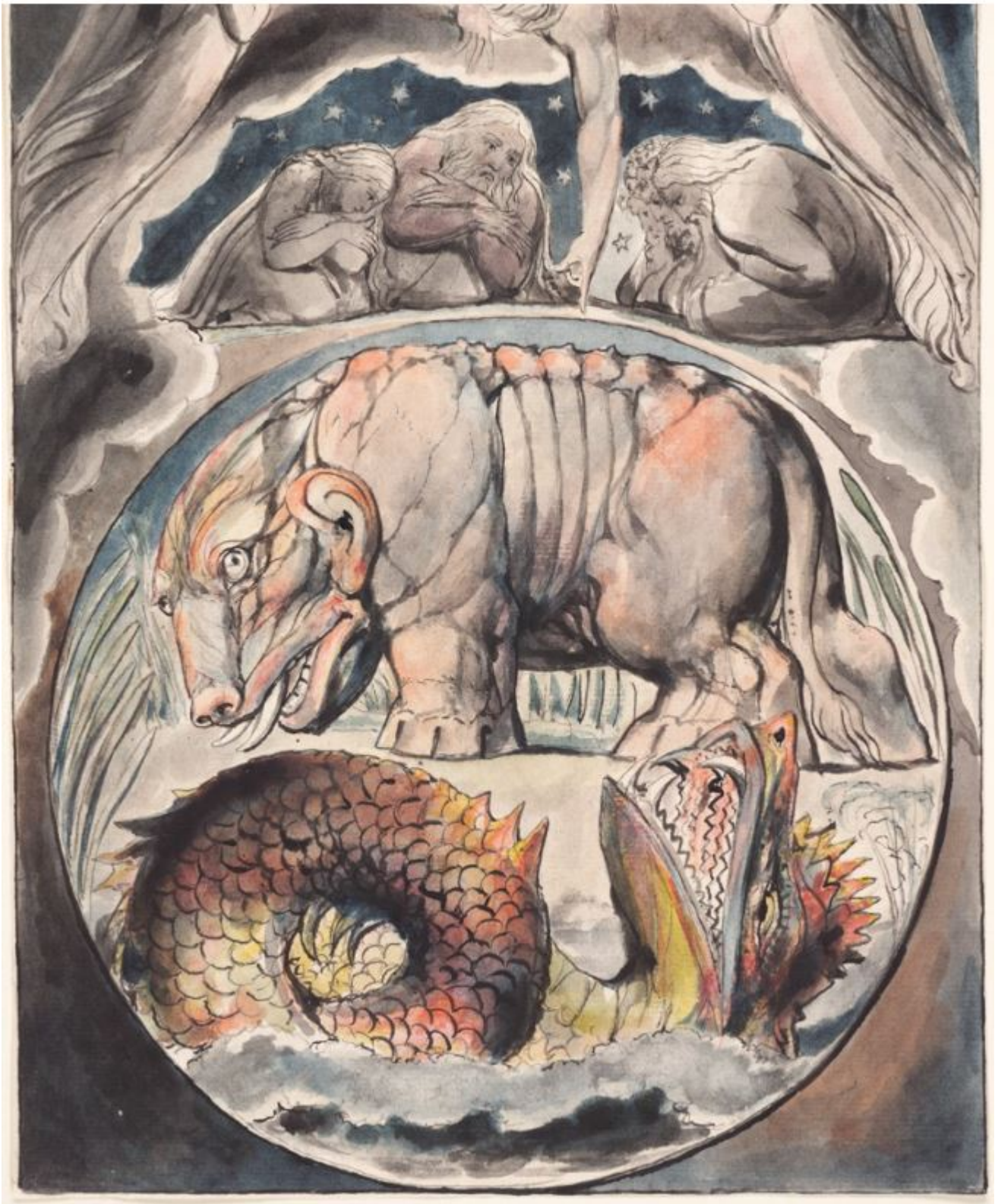


The Wizard of Oz: Job's Theology

by [David P. Gontar](#) (December 2020)



Behold Now Behemoth, Which I Made With Thee (The Book of Job), William Blake, 1821

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace,
and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.
—*Isaiah 45:7*

At a moment when many are turning to their faith to comprehend a gathering gloom, it may be *apropos* to glance at the Old Testament's *Book of Job*. There in the ancient "Land of Uz" presides an impulsive and unruly spirit, far more unsettled than the compassionate shepherd (e.g., Psalm 23) to whom we have grown accustomed. We recognize our present Savior as the fountainhead of caritas, brotherhood, and moral strictures, the object of praise and heartfelt petitions. But because our Redeemer liveth as largely affirmative, He is predominantly homogeneous. The God featured in the *Book of Job* is more variegated, an impassioned, conflicted *Zauberer*, celestial and chthonic, capricious and given to pranks. Usually the *Book of Job* is consulted to draw the fangs of the "problem of evil," a philosophical effort to explain how it is that our world, supervised by a strong and caring Agency, should be filled with pain and sorrows: Like Job we must suffer, but in the end we meet our Maker and prosper. QED. The divine character and personality *per se* are not taken up in that Biblical application. When we do finally read its verses we are startled to see that the God of *Job* seems to dwell nearly as close to vice as to virtue. For popular theologians the precise make-up of God in *Job* is not of great interest. Their theodicies recycle the same intellectual gambits aimed at defeating the Gnostic heresy deeming creation itself evil. Yet the narrative of *Job* is fundamentally a vivid personal drama in which our Master lives, moves, and often exhibits himself in abrasive act and speech. *Job's* supreme being is no humdrum hero but a restless prince whose manifold foibles make our interactions with Him as fraught with risk as with rewards. This gives new and powerful sense to the locution "the fear of the Lord." In what follows we will briefly sojourn with the God who stars in the *Book of Job* and ruminate upon His idiosyncrasies and indiscretions. Detailed treatment of the *dialogue* of Job and his three friends is set aside to focus on sacred character.

1. The Prologue

Following the acknowledgement of Job as a servant of the Lord, flawless in all respects (1:1), we find ourselves beyond the firmament where God holds court. [Note that the first description of Job as “perfect” comes from the scriptural writer and is echoed by God (1:8; 2:3). No doubt is left about this.]

Here is the first of two often-neglected verses. Let us take it as seriously as it was intended.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord. Job (1:6-12)

2. Commentary

Here Satan is evidently one of the “sons of God” also mentioned in Genesis 6:2. Even though he is technically an Adversary, he appears at a social gathering up Yonder. He is queried as to his recent whereabouts, implying he is not confined to Hell. In fact, Satan is something of a foot-loose

dandy, having just returned from an earthly or earthy vacation where he observed the qualities of people. (Cp. *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.55) There is no indication that Satan crashes the party. Rather we witness a warm exchange of father and son in which the devil, as kin to God Himself, is not anathematized. On the contrary. The two strike up an intimate chat in which God boasts to his son, Satan, of Job's probity and fidelity. It seems that God is inordinately proud of Job's devotion and mentions no rivals. Satan then cleverly turns the tables on his father by teasingly observing that Job's obedience is nothing but a function of favors and blessings. Remove those gratuities and your "perfect" servant will curse you to your face, says he. (Job 1:11) God accepts Satan's implicit wager or experiment, giving him actual authority to oppress Job in every way but physical outrage. Here God stumbles into a trap, for even if Job should prove loyal to Him during the proposed cruelties, Satan will have prevailed in having ruined this noble man and stolen his bliss. Do we care? Ironically, this wager is designed to measure Job's fidelity—with Job picking up the tab.

Put in the balance we behold:

1. God's pride prompts him to boast of Job's perfection;
2. God does not resist Satan's temptation