

Deuteronomy, Amos, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes (from *The Hebrew Bible* in English, published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917 Edition. In these texts, as well as in Job, we address the issue of why there is suffering. In Deuteronomy, the last of the five books of the Pentateuch or Torah, Moses reiterates to the people that if they obey the LORD and follow the 613 Laws they will prosper, but should they disobey HIM, they will be cursed and suffer horribly.¹ Amos reiterates this commonly shared view held by all the Hebrew Prophets -- that the LORD is responsible for all that occurs, including the suffering that comes from famine, drought, blight and destruction. Suffering is understood as punishment for not following the LORD. Amos prophesizes that all those who transgress against the LORD, both the enemies of Israel as well as the people of Israel themselves, will be punished by the LORD. As predicted, after the death of Amos the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE. A sampling of aphorisms aimed at social harmony and a happy life are rendered in the verses from Proverbs, which is one of the books called the “wisdom literature” of the Hebrew Bible. We again see in Proverbs the classic view that the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished by the LORD.² In the selection of verses from Ecclesiastes we sense some of the notions of Jewish “realism,” “acceptance,” and resignation of what life brings forth. Partial source: Phillip Novak. *The World’s Wisdom*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books. 1994:206, 210.)

Deuteronomy

(People of Israel Will Succeed and Prosper If Follow the LORD)

28:1 And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth. **2** And all these blessings shall come upon thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. **3** Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. **4** Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the young of thy flock. **5** Blessed shall be thy basket and thy kneading-trough. **6** Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. **7** The LORD will cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thee; they shall come out against thee one way, and shall flee before thee seven ways. **8** The LORD will command the blessing with thee in thy barns, and in all that thou puttest thy hand unto; and He will bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. **9** The LORD will establish thee for a holy people unto Himself, as He hath sworn unto thee; if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in His ways.

(People of Israel Will Suffer If Do Not Follow the LORD)

28:15 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee. **16** Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed

1 Moses had already given the Ten Commandments to the people upon coming off Mount Sinai; but the people failed to obey the LORD and had been vanquished to the wilderness.

2 This theme is reiterated throughout the Hebrew Bible, beginning with the first transgression of Adam and Eve against the LORD, and the suffering that followed (expulsion from Eden, and the pain of childbirth and cursed to work the soil), continuing with the account of the Flood that destroyed the entire human race (and all animal life) for its disobedience, except for Noah and his family, and continuing with enslavement in Egypt and being led to the Promised land by Moses, and the cycles of suffering and hope are repeated.

shalt thou be in the field. **17** Cursed shall be thy basket and thy kneading-trough. **18** Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the young of thy flock. **19** Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. **20** The LORD will send upon thee cursing, discomfiture, and rebuke, in all that thou puttest thy hand unto to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the evil of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken Me. **21** The LORD will make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until He have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest in to possess it. **22** The LORD will smite thee with consumption, and with fever, and with inflammation, and with fiery heat, and with drought, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. **23** And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. **24** The LORD will make the rain of thy land powder and dust; from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. **25** The LORD will cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies; thou shalt go out one way against them, and shalt flee seven ways before them; and thou shalt be a horror unto all the kingdoms of the earth. **26** And thy carcasses shall be food unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and there shall be none to frighten them away. **27** The LORD will smite thee with the boil of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. **28** The LORD will smite thee with madness, and with blindness, and with astonishment of heart. **29** And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not make thy ways prosperous; and thou shalt be only oppressed and robbed away, and there shall be none to save thee.

Amos

(The Lord is Responsible for All that Occurs)

3:3 Will two walk together, except they have agreed? **4** Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion give forth his voice out of his den, if he have taken nothing? **5** Will a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where there is no lure for it? Will a snare spring up from the ground, and have taken nothing at all? **6** Shall the horn be blown in a city, and the people not tremble? Shall evil befall a city, and the LORD hath not done it? **7** For the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His counsel unto His servants the prophets. **8** The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?

(The Lord is the Source of Famine, Drought and Disaster)

4:6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the LORD. **7** And I also have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. **8** So two or three cities wandered unto one city to drink water, and were not satisfied; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the LORD. **9** I have smitten you with blasting and mildew; the multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees hath the palmer-worm devoured; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the LORD. **10** I have sent among you the pestilence in the way of Egypt; your young men have I slain with the sword, and have carried away your horses; and I have made the stench of your camp to come up even into your nostrils; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the LORD. **11** I have overthrown some of

you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the LORD. **12** Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. **13** For, lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the LORD, the God of hosts, is His name.

(The Enemies of Israel Shall Suffer by the Hand of the LORD)

1: 3 For thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Damascus (capital city of Syria), yea, for four, I will not reverse it: because they have threshed Gilead with sledges of iron. **4** So will I send a fire into the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad; **5** And I will break the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from Bikath-Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Beth-eden; and the people of Aram shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD.

(The People of Israel Shall Suffer by the Hand of the LORD)

2: 6 Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not reverse it: because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; **7** That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the humble; and a man and his father go unto the same maid, to profane My holy name; **8** And they lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge, and in the house of their God they drink the wine of them that have been fined. **9** Yet destroyed I the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath. **10** Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorites. **11** And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the LORD. **12** But ye gave the Nazirites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying: 'Prophecy not.' **13** Behold, I will make it creak under you, as a cart creaketh that is full of sheaves. **14** And flight shall fail the swift, and the strong shall not exert his strength, neither shall the mighty deliver himself; **15** Neither shall he stand that handleth the bow; and he that is swift of foot shall not deliver himself; neither shall he that rideth the horse deliver himself; **16** And he that is courageous among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, saith the LORD.

Proverbs

(The Way to Harmony)

4:7 The beginning of wisdom is: Get wisdom; yea, with all thy getting get understanding.

6:6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise;

9:8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee; reprove a wise man, and he will love thee.

11:13 He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth a matter.

11:25 The beneficent soul shall be made rich, and he that satisfieth abundantly shall be satisfied also himself.

12:1 Whoso loveth knowledge loveth correction; but he that is brutish hateth reproof.

15:1 A soft answer turneth away wrath; but a grievous word stirreth up anger.

16:18 Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

26:11 As a dog that returneth to his vomit, so is a fool that repeateth his folly.

(Wicked Suffer; Righteous Rewarded by the LORD)

3:33 The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked; but He blesseth the habitation of the righteous.

10:3 The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but He thrusteth away the desire of the wicked.

11: 8 The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.

11: 19 Stedfast righteousness tendeth to life; but he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.

12: 21 There shall no mischief befall the righteous; but the wicked are filled with evil.

13: 21 Evil pursueth sinners; but to the righteous good shall be repaid.

Ecclesiastes

(All Things Are Wearisome)

1:4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; and the earth abideth for ever. **5** The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he ariseth. **6** The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its circuit, and the wind returneth again to its circuits. **7** All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again. **8** All things toil to weariness; man cannot utter it, the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. **9** That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. **10** Is there a thing whereof it is said: 'See, this is new'?--it hath been already, in the ages which were before us. **11** There is no remembrance of them of former times; neither shall there be any remembrance of them of latter times that are to come, among those that shall come after. **12** I Koheleth have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. **13** And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven; it is a sore task that God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. **14** I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

(Hedonism Is No Solution)

2:1 I said in my heart: 'Come now, I will try thee with mirth, and enjoy pleasure'; and, behold, this also was vanity. **2** I said of laughter: 'It is mad'; and of mirth: 'What doth it accomplish?' **3** I searched in my heart how to pamper my flesh with wine, and, my heart conducting itself with wisdom, how yet to lay hold on folly, till I might see which it was best for the sons of men that they should do under the heaven the few days of their life. **4** I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; **5** I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit; **6** I made me pools of water, to water therefrom the wood springing up with trees; **7** I acquired men-servants and maid-servants, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in Jerusalem; **8** I gathered me also silver and gold, and treasure such as kings and the provinces have as their own; I got me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, women very many. **9** So I

was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom stood me in stead. **10** And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart had joy of all my labour; and this was my portion from all my labour. **11** Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

(You Can't Take It with You)

2:16 For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance for ever; seeing that in the days to come all will long ago have been forgotten. And how must the wise man die even as the fool! **17** So I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind. **18** And I hated all my labour wherein I laboured under the sun, seeing that I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me. **19** And who knoweth whether he will be a wise man or a fool? yet will he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. **20** Therefore I turned about to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labour wherein I had laboured under the sun.

(For Everything There Is a Season)

3:1 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;**3** A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;**4** A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;**5** A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;**6** A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;**7** A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;**8** A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

(Death Is the End)

3:19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; for all is vanity. **20** All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return to dust.

(Better Not to Have Been Born)

4:1 But I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter. **2** Wherefore I praised the dead that are already dead more than the living that are yet alive; **3** but better than they both is he that hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

(Chance, Not Justice, Governs)

9:11 I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. **12** For man also knoweth not his time; as the fishes that

are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

(Enjoy Your Lot)

5:18 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour--this is the gift of God.

8:17 then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

9:7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy works.