

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

### **Title Page** from *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, 1823/1825

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 a)

The title page of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* sets the stage for the eponymous Old Testament protagonist's arduous, often confusing, and ultimately redemptive journey. Seven angels—Lucifer (the ego), Molech (the executioner), Elohim (the judge), Shaddai (the accuser), Pahad (resentment), Jehovah (the teacher), and Jesus (the savior)—descend and rise again in a graceful visual allegory of Job's path to enlightenment.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job and His Family***, plate 1 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 b)

Plate 1 illustrates Job's spiritual innocence. A hardworking, pious, and honorable man, he holds the Book of Law open on his lap, gathers his family around him for evening prayers, and silences their musical instruments—their only outlet for spontaneous praise. To Job's right is his spiritual fortune (his church) and to his left are his material possessions (his farm and flocks), for Job believes that his enormous wealth is his reward for his devotion. Indeed, while Job is basically good, prosperity on earth—not true enlightenment—is his ultimate incentive.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Satan before the Throne of God***, plate 2  
from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***,  
1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 c)

Plate 2 illustrates the crisis of Job's faith. His God (enthroned at the apex of the composition) is his ideal and therefore his reflection, and by this logic Job is perfect. But, recognizing that his perfection is driven by piety and fueled by the anxiety of judgment, Job allows the Accuser (Satan) to enter his psyche and destabilize his personal pantheon. As Satan dashes through the center of the composition, Job and his wife emerge, spectral and ignorant, alongside him. Down below are Job and his family on Earth, holding books as proof of their principled devotion and as talismans against their inexorable sin and corruption.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Destruction of Job's Sons***, plate 3  
from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***,  
1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 d)

Plate 3 illustrates Job's guilt in action. The Accuser (Satan) swoops in darkly from the heavens, destroying Job's sons, their lovers, and the pleasure palace in which they have been cavorting. Satan, however, is merely the personification of Job's anger, created in his psyche out of vengeance against his progeny and their perverse deviation from holy matrimony. As Job proclaims his sons dead to him, he callously punishes their misguided rapacity; yet he knows—and fears—that even as he judges, he, too, will inevitably be judged.

**WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Messengers tell Job of his  
Misfortunes***, plate 4 from ***Illustrations of  
the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 e)

Plate 4 illustrates the consequences of Job's bitterness. Two messengers stride forth bringing news of the death of his sons, as Job and his wife look on in disbelief and anguish. The two stone crosses beneath which the couple sits do nothing to ease their pain or to quell Job's guilt. Instead, Satan, standing triumphantly in the margins, penetrates more deeply into Job's soul, as his true spiritual reward—personified by sleeping angels—lies dormant.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Satan Going Forth from the Presence of the Lord***, plate 5 from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 f)

Plate 5 illustrates the insincerity of Job's charity. After brutally denouncing his sons, he offers his last loaf of bread to a blind stranger. His motivation, however, is not sympathy, but obligation, for he believes that even superficial acts of benevolence offer proof of his piety and guarantee his reward. Consequently, Satan intensifies his powerful hold over Job, repelling the angels who attempt to surround him, penetrating his mind with the fires of guilt, and erasing the halo around the head of his God, who puts down the Book of Law. Meanwhile, the church has disappeared from Job's life, replaced by a Neolithic monument, a symbol of the primitive religion of Moral Law and its preference for the Self over others.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Satan Smiting Job with Boils***, plate 6  
from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***,  
1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 g)

Plate 6 illustrates Job's conflicted sensuality. An emasculated Satan pins him down and infects him with skin boils, an affliction traditionally associated with venereal disease but here a metaphor for Job's flawed spirituality. One by one, four of Job's five senses (signified by the four arrows that Satan casts down) wither away and die, leaving only the fifth—touch—now brutally compromised and corrupted. To the left, the sun drops below the horizon as Job's wife weeps at his feet; indeed, Job's anxiety and guilt over his physical and emotional needs have disrupted his life, destroyed his marriage, and eclipsed his path to enlightenment.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job's Comforters***, plate 7 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 h)

In plate 7, Job learns the nature of friendship. Stricken and despondent, he receives a contingent of visitors, who, visibly shocked by his grim condition, commiserate with false sympathy and reinforce his pain. Job's inability to relate to his peers exposes how far he has strayed, for his friends' attempts to console him only reflect his damaged physicality, which has undermined his earthly existence and, by extension, his misdirected piety.



## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job's Despair***, plate 8 from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 i)

In plate 8, Job reacts to his trials. His seven-day mourning period over the death of his sons has ended, and his patience with his misfortunes has worn thin. Stepping away from his stone cross (which continues to shelter his weeping friends) he angrily questions the justice of his suffering and begins to doubt his God. Job's blind rage and bitter despair mark a turning point in his path to enlightenment, for he has begun to realize the disconnect between his wealth and his happiness, between his spiritual devotion and his material rewards.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Vision of Eliphaz***, plate 9 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10620 j)

In plate 9, Job seeks the advice of his friends. Huddled together in heated conversation, they argue that his suffering is the retribution of a vengeful God. Eliphaz describes this God by gesturing forcefully at a frightening vision: a nightmarish specter whose hands—and intentions—are eerily concealed. To Job's circle, God is a bitter judge who metes out punishment to those who deserve it, and Job's loss is therefore retribution for his sins. But their efforts to explain Job's trials do little to justify his misguided faith; instead, they block his path to true spiritual enlightenment.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job Rebuked by his Friends***, plate 10  
from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***,  
1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 k)

Plate 10 finds Job and his friends in bitter conflict. Believing that God has renounced their companion and recognizing that he has let Satan into his soul, they shrink from his presence and violently condemn him—just as Job had denounced his own children. Even Job's wife begins to question his integrity: she gazes mournfully at him, awaiting an explanation. But Job remains firmly under the spell of his vengeful God: maintaining his innocence, he demands justification for the calamities that have befallen him.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job's Evil Dreams***, plate 11 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 I)

In plate 11, Job hits bottom. The God of Justice hovers over him, pointing to the Book of Law, even as he reveals his cloven left hoof! Indeed, Eliphaz's God—rancorous and accusing—is Satan, masquerading as an angel while meting out judgment and guilt. Job, having endured and analyzed his trials, now recognizes that his God is his devil, entwined in the serpent of his own materialism as demons emerge from the fires below. The path to salvation begins to clear for Job: he is now poised to realize that the true God is benevolent, that sin is indistinguishable from punishment, and that virtue lies in forgiveness.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Wrath of Elihu***, plate 12 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 m)

In plate 12, Job and his friends have reached an impasse. Job continues to pity himself, while his friends sit silently in accusation; Elihu steps forth, gesturing to the heavens, and describes Job's misery as God's will and powerful message. Text printed in the margin at the top of the page elaborates Elihu's pronouncements: Job's losses, his pain, and his nightmares are divine assertions that his suffering is his punishment. Meanwhile, Job's humanity sleeps silently in the lower margin, holding a scroll as angels attempt to rouse him. Soon, he will awaken to the knowledge that the true God is indifferent to the virtues and faults of the faithful.

**WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind***, plate 13 from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 n)

In plate 13, Job discovers the true God. His wife by his side, he looks on in rapture, as a powerful whirlwind sweeps in beneath the clouds, flattening his friends in their bewilderment and ignorance. Riding this wind is a benevolent God, who responds to Job's laments with unconditional forgiveness, for his theology has no use for judgment, guilt, material wealth, or physical punishment. At last Job is humbled, his faith is restored, and he is free to follow the path to spiritual enlightenment.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Creation***, plate 14 from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 o)

Blake theorized that the material world was eclipsed by a duality of wisdom and emotion, which he termed the Divine Imagination. In plate 14, the Divine Imagination is revealed to Job as the true faith. As Job kneels on Earth with his wife and friends, the Greek god Apollo—the intellect personified—rides through the heavens above him, while the goddess Diana, representing the heart, sits to Apollo's left. Between Apollo and Diana is God, who stretches out his arms to safeguard the heart and intellect, and acts as a heavenly conduit between the realm of the flesh and the domain of the imagination. Indeed, the Divine Imagination is the human soul, where the flesh, the brain, the heart, and the mind operate as one.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Behemoth and Leviathan***, plate 15 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 p)

In plate 15, God reveals the nature of human conflict. Reaching down through a ring of clouds, he points to a terrifying sight: Leviathan (pride) and Behemoth (war), thrashing and straining against the narrow confines a bubble. This sphere is the subconscious—the mind's most mysterious dominion—and war and pride are the battling forces within it. Restrained deep in the psyche, their energy fuels the Divine Imagination; unleashed on earth, it destroys it.



## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Fall of Satan***, plate 16 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 q)

In plate 16, Job recognizes his errors. Satan (the Accuser) is banished from his universe, along with Job's mistakes and his wife's delusions, now given human form. The three dive, headlong and ashamed, into the blazing inferno that will annihilate them, for Job, newly cognizant of his sins, is at liberty to destroy them. He breaks with his friends, who cower across the chasm, and restores the true God, now flanked by love and pity, to his pantheon.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***The Vision of God***, plate 17 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 r)

Plate 17 illustrates Job's mystical ecstasy. God appears to Job and his wife, and they immediately recognize him as their comrade and human likeness. But their moment of awareness is lost on their friends, who, able to perceive God only as a searing bright light, shrink away into darkness. In the margin below an angel presents texts from the Gospel of St. John, which conflate the identity of father and son—God and the faithful—in a message of universal forgiveness.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job's Sacrifice***, plate 18 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 s)

Plate 18 illustrates Job's spiritual triumph. His moment of ecstasy has ended, and God incarnate has withdrawn into the blazing sun. But Job, discovering that he can reconnect with God through prayer and contemplation, stands before an altar of stone from which burns the flame of the spirit. Arms outstretched, he prays for his friends (even though they doubted him). In forgiving them, he sacrifices his ego, and escapes Satan's hold forever.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job Accepting Charity***, plate 19 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 t)

In plate 19, Job finally grasps that charity is driven by virtue. Eager to help him get back on his feet, his friends come calling, laden with gifts—one even offers him her gold earring. Their genuine open-heartedness contrasts with the empty obligation out of which Job fed the beggar in plate 5, for, while the old Job was insincere in his generosity, the new Job's kindness of spirit is infectious. Having at last conquered his pride, he can now truly reap his rewards; sheaves of wheat and abundant fig trees in the margins indicate his awakening prosperity.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job and His Daughters***, plate 20 from  
***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25  
Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 u)

Plate 20 illustrates the return of Job's daughters. Painting, Poetry, and Music—the arts personified—had vanished during Job's trials; now they have returned to hear their father's story. Job knows that, newly redeemed, he must show others the way, and he gathers the arts around him in the knowledge that enlightenment is mirrored in the creative spirit. He sits with his arms outstretched in a gesture of prayer, a picture of God in the whirlwind above him. To his right and left are panels that illustrate his suffering. The inscriptions in the margin come from Psalm 139, which describes inspiration as divine and universal.

## **WILLIAM BLAKE**

England, 1757–1827

***Job and His Wife Restored to Prosperity***, plate 21 from ***Illustrations of the Book of Job***, 1823/25

Engraving

Purchase, 1937 (10,620 v)

Plate 21 illustrates the happy conclusion to Job's story. Now liberated from judgment and truly enlightened, he has regained his wealth and restored harmony in his family, who gather around him in celebration. Poetry sings from a scroll, while Music accompanies her on a lyre; Painting holds a thin volume in her hands, referencing Blake's work as a printmaker. Indeed, no longer kneeling in silent prayer and having dispensed with the Book of Law, Job and his family exult in music and art, for they have discovered the true faith—the Divine Imagination.