

## **Motifs in Book of Job**

### **SEM-II MIC ENGLISH**

#### **The Covenant**

God's covenant with humankind incorporates both his promise to grant Abraham and Abraham's descendants a promised land and the religious laws given to the Israelites. The covenant resembles ancient legal codes and treaties in which a lord or landowner specifies the conditions of a vassal's service and vows to protect the vassal in return. The biblical covenant, however, represents not just a contractual agreement but also a passionate, tumultuous relationship between God and humanity. God's covenant passes to Abraham's descendants, unifying the lives of seemingly disparate people within a developing story. The biblical writers suggest that this story is not theirs but God's—a means for God to show his purposes and his values to humankind by relating to one family.

The covenant is a unifying structure that allows the human characters to evaluate their lives as a series of symbolic experiences. At first, the signs of the covenant are physical and external. God relates to Abraham by commanding Abraham to perform the rite of circumcision and to kill his son, Isaac. In Exodus, God shows his commitment to the Israelites by miraculously separating the waters of the Red Sea and appearing in a pillar of fire. The religious laws are also symbols of the covenant. They represent customs and behavioral rules that unite the lives of the Israelites in a religious community devoted to God. Moses suggests that these laws are to become sacred words that the Israelites cherish in their hearts and minds (Deuteronomy 11:18). The covenant thus shapes the personal memories and the collective identity of the Israelites.

#### **Doubles and Opposites**

At the beginning of Genesis, God creates the world by dividing it into a system of doubles—the sun and the moon, light and dark, the land and the sea, and male and female. When Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, and when Cain kills his brother Abel, good and evil enter the world. From this point on, the Old Testament writers describe the world as a place of binary opposites, or sets of two basic opposing forces. These forces include positive and negative, good and bad, and lesser and greater. These distinctions characterize the ethics of the Israelites. The laws in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy outline the criteria for being ceremonially clean or unclean, and for choosing obedience over disobedience.

Biblical writers frequently challenge these distinctions. As twins with opposing traits, Jacob and Esau represent ideal character doubles. When Jacob steals Esau's inheritance right, the younger son triumphs over the older son by dishonest, rather than honest, means. The reversal of fortune portrays God's covenant with humankind as a preference for the unexpected over the conventional, as well as God's willingness to accomplish his ends by imperfect means. The epic of Samson similarly blurs the line between weakness and strength. Samson, the icon of human strength, conquers the Philistines only after they bring him to his weakest by shaving his head and blinding him. Such stories question the human ability to tell the difference between good and bad.