



SETTING: A court scene. My father's favorite OT scripture, which he often quoted at supper upon returning from his court. ...SANCTION, divine: God has "shown" as (vv.4f) the exodus God!

This summary of the prophetic message, perhaps the locus classicus of Jewish religion and thus at the heart of Christianity, is elegantly structured as three, three-beats-to-the-line, quatrains. In your Bible, letter the quatrains A, B, and C [= vv. 6, 7, 8]; then number each of the four lines in each quatrain 1, 2, 3, 4--as the rest of this thinksheet will refer thus rather than to vv. [If we used the vv. division, the quatrain lines would be, e.g. in vs.8, thus: 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d]....SITUATION: Something has gone wrong, and it's assumed God is out of sorts about something --as two women standing on a streetcorner after yesterday's [21 Mar 76] storm were arguing one of them that God was punishing America and the other that God was punishing N.J.--and along comes a minister who says, "Had you thought it might just be the weather?" The women saying it's theological, the religious leader that it's not! The minister had a point; but taken too far, the point would eliminate biblical religion. Parallel our passage, the Iliad would not exist without its opening scene: a plague is interpreted as Apollo's displeasure-alienation, and the question--just as in our passage--is how to "come before" [a technical expression, in our passage, for "access" or approach] God....Hermeneutic ASSUMPTIONS: If one were to assume that the gods do not exist, the access-to-God issue would not exist; nor would it if one were to assume that the gods are [as in Epicureanism] unapproachable, or that the divine-human are [as in philosophical Hinduism] identical or [as in Romanticism] indivisible-inseparable [e.g., Wordsworth's "nearer than breathing, closer than hands and feet"]. What, on the contrary, our passage, and the whole of biblical religion, assumes is that [1] God loves us, [2] enters into covenant with us, [3] is faithful to his side of the covenant [see #775, "chesedh"], [4] requires that we conform to his character as Holy Love and [5] "walk" with him in humble openness to his will, [6] repenting-returning when by "sin" we have distanced ourselves from him, [7] a breach-healing that occurs, through "grace," when we re-conform ourselves to his nature and will. Existentially, the assumpton is that "adam"-man [1] has violated the covenant through [C4] injustice, ruthless insensitivity, and prideful egocentrism [narcissism, humanism], and needs to "return" [the Heb. term for repentance] across the consequent distance to God. Thus,....AIM: To overcome the estrangement by expiation, propitiation [AB]....THEME: What God wants, i.e. what is acceptable to him as sufficient for closing the gap, effecting reconciliation, or--lower-coil put--cooling his anger....The PROCESS: Just liturgical action [A2], won't get the job done: we must bring some offering [A1]. What we bring may be viewed as a love-gift, as a business negotiation, as a bribe to a venal judge [here, an escalation of fees or bribes; calves, thousands...rivers, first-born(A3-B4)]. [In this popular religion, the offerings can be ordinary or, as from the rich in goods [thousands...rivers] or in liturgical devotion [first-born], extraordinary: ignorance and impenitence render all such efforts ineffective.] What is acceptable is nothing that any of us has, but only something that each of us is, viz. a living-acting self [C]....TONE-MOOD: Not that of the condemning prophet, but that of the sympathetic, pleading teacher whose message is as profound as it is concise. Giving the inner is not enough [A2], and giving the outer is not enough [A3-B4]; with the gift of self, inner and outer are both given, and given in integrity and integration: contrast the inauthentic bodysoul integration in B4. The Holy One will not accept sacred substitutes for life-holiness, which is what he "requires" [C2, the vb. from which we get the Heb. wd. for interpretation, viz. "midrash"]. NB: The point of character is not that it has any value in itself ["good for good's sake," an end in itself] but that it's the only acceptable means of access to God, in communion with whom life is to culminate for the whole creation in justice-joy ["shalom"]....ADDRESSEE: "You've been told, Adam...!" [C1]: the individual [as Jer., therefore perhaps 7th c. though usu. put as the last of the 8th-c.prophets] as socially responsible [a liberation theologian!][C3] destined for sanctity [C4]....PARTICULARS: First, to "establish justice" or "do right" or "do the right" or "do righteousness" [e.g., Jn. Q. Adams' address to the Supreme Court in the Amistad case]. Juridical, rational, fair-play oriented. Cf. Amos. Second [2 of the 3 being on humanity, as 1Jn.4.20], "love kindness or good-will or goodness or leal-love." Relational, emotional [root "bow," diff. fr. vs.6]. Hosea. Third, like Is., "walk eagerly with God" [modest openness].

OVER