

Job 7:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?

Analysis

Job questions why God treats him like dangerous cosmic forces requiring constant surveillance. The 'sea' (yam, ים) and 'whale' (tannin, תנין, better translated as 'sea monster' or 'dragon') represent primordial chaos in ancient Near Eastern cosmology. In Canaanite mythology, Yam was the sea god requiring divine restraint. The verb 'settest a watch' (sim mishmar, שִׁים מִשְׁמָר) means to station a guard, suggesting God treats Job as a dangerous threat requiring containment.

Job's rhetorical question protests the disproportion between God's power and Job's frailty. Why does the Almighty deploy such overwhelming surveillance against one finite human? This echoes Psalm 8:4, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him?' but with bitter irony instead of grateful wonder. Job feels God's attention not as blessing but as oppressive scrutiny.

The imagery anticipates God's later response in chapters 40-41, where Behemoth and Leviathan represent forces only God can control. Job's question—'Am I like these monsters?'—receives unexpected affirmation: yes, human sinfulness resembles chaos requiring divine restraint. Yet God's answer also reveals compassion: He constrains not to destroy but to preserve until redemption accomplishes its work.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern creation myths featured gods battling sea monsters (Tiamat in Babylon, Yam in Canaan). The Bible demythologizes these figures—they're not

rival deities but creatures under God's sovereign control (Psalm 74:13-14, Isaiah 27:1). Job's reference shows familiarity with these cultural concepts while maintaining monotheism.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing our sinful hearts' resemblance to chaos help us understand God's disciplining providence?
2. In what ways can we misinterpret God's attentive care as oppressive surveillance rather than loving protection?
3. How does Christ's triumph over chaos and death transform our understanding of divine restraint?

Interlinear Text

מִשְׁׁמָר:	עַל	יְמִים	מִשְׁׁמָר:	עַל	יְמִים	מִשְׁׁמָר:	עַל	יְמִים
Am I a sea	H589	H518	or a whale	H3588	that thou settest	H7760	H5921	a watch

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