

## Doth Job Fear God for Nought?

*"I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not ... Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3-6).*

We are once again reading together the marvellous book of Job. It is the only non-Jewish book of the Bible, and it is in all probability the oldest book of the Bible. Many eminent men—both religious and non-religious—have called it the supreme literary production in all the world's history. It is, from any point of view, a most remarkable piece of writing.

### THE PLACE AND TIME

From the names of the characters and their ancestors, and the place names, the location of the story lies in the area between the Dead Sea and the desert, or somewhat to the north or south of that: the area of the descendants of Abraham other than through Jacob—generally speaking, the Arabs. Job was one of the "Men of the East," a term applied to the Arabs: Ishmaelites, Edomites, etc. And the *time* seems most likely to be during the two hundred or so years Israel was in Egypt. All the background and customs and genealogy point to this place and time.

As to how the book of Job got into an otherwise wholly Jewish Bible, there is a strong and ancient Jewish tradition that Moses wrote it, or at least made it part of the Scriptures—by the guidance of the Spirit of course. Moses would have been the logical one to do so. He may well have known Job himself, or Job's early descendants, during the forty years he was in Midian. Job was the greatest (and therefore best known) of the "Men of the East" (Job 1:3), and Midian would be included in that area. The history of Job would be well-known there.

It is remarkable that the great typical and exemplary patient sufferer of the Old Testament is not a Jew, but rather is of a race which—though closely related—was always, and still is, in deep antagonism to the Jews. He was a Gentile—a non-Jew, that is—of the seed of Abraham, adding to the beauty and fitness of the typical picture.

### A NON-JEWISH MODEL OF EXCELLENCE

Here, in the midst of an otherwise Jewish book, is a perfect model of excellence for all time: a man who is not a Jew, not under the Law, who had nothing to do with the Law, nothing to do with Israel. He is referred to by Ezekiel (14:14), with Noah and Daniel, as three outstanding examples of righteousness. He is referred to by James (5:11) as the ultimate example of patient, faithful suffering.

The story opens with the simple picture of worshipers of God coming together before Him, and among them a bitter, jealous adversary making a travesty and mockery of it. Orthodoxy represents its Devil as having free access to God's heaven, and being God's agent and accomplice. One respectable modern commentary, the *"New Bible Commentary,"* says concerning this scene that the Devil is a "divine agent," and is the supreme cynic of the heavenly court." What a debased, pagan conception of God's holy dwelling-place!—in perfect harmony with the crude gods and heavens of Greece and Rome, but certainly not with the Scriptures of Truth.

*"Doth Job fear God for nought?"* He DID: and so must we. Our motive must be love alone, and not self-benefit, though self benefit will inevitably follow, for goodness can lead only at last to

goodness, in a world ruled by the goodness of God. But our *motivation* must be pure love of God and of goodness.

### WHY DO THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER?

The great *question* of the book of Job is: Why do the righteous suffer? And the great *lesson* is: We must totally and unquestioningly trust God, and have implicit faith in His love, mercy and justice, regardless of any appearances or circumstances. He has a reason and a purpose in the suffering of His people: different reasons at different times, but all working toward their ultimate glorification—often a reason (as here) that would be impossible for man ever to guess without knowing what was in God's mind.

The sufferings of Christ point to the same problem: *Why?* We can dimly perceive how he was "*made perfect through suffering*," and how his perfect submission to that suffering laid the eternal foundation for the world's redemption from *all* suffering.

But, above all, we must unhesitatingly *accept* the ways of God because He is God; because He manifestly has made all things, and knows the reason for all. He has manifested His infinite power and wisdom in all the beauties and glories of Creation. He proclaims His love and justice in His Word. He overwhelmingly manifests His divinity in that Word.

We must accept the whole picture, or reject the whole picture. To reject it in the light of its overpowering evidence is stupidity. To question God's ways in the light of His overpowering greatness is obviously equal stupidity. This is the lesson of Job. The final outcome manifested God's wisdom and love and compassion. We must have implicit trust that it always will *if we do our part faithfully*.

It was a high honor and privilege for Job to be used by God to demonstrate for all ages what true righteousness and faith really is, and to give an example of patient integrity in the face of what appeared to everyone, including Job himself, a deliberate divine effort to afflict and torment him to the uttermost.

### JOB AND CHRIST: STRIKING PARALLELS

We see throughout, a very striking, broad parallel between Job and Christ, although there are necessarily differences and contrasts.

Both were the outstandingly righteous men of their age.

Both suffered more intensely and grievously than is recorded of any other man. Christ suffered more greatly, and more extendedly, for he lived his whole life in the shadow of the inevitable cross, under the constant burden of required perfection, or all Creation would have been betrayed. And in his deep and superhuman empathy, he suffered all the sufferings of his people of all ages. Infinitely more even than Paul he could say: "***Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?***"

He was pre-eminently a Man of Sorrows (Isa. 53:3), though at the same time a Man of incomparable Joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13).

With both, God knew from the beginning that they would hold fast to the end, regardless of the intensity of the trial: and God built His purpose upon that assurance. What a glorious role for men to play! If Job had failed, the adversary would have been triumphant, and God would have been put to shame: His whole dispensation of love exposed as mere self-serving.

Both were reduced in shame from the highest position to the lowest, though in different ways. Christ, as the only begotten Son of God, was the potential heir of the universe. As Paul explains to the Philippians (2:6-8), though finding himself the one special man above all men, even the "Fellow" of God (Zech. 13:7), entitled to the homage of the angels (Heb. 1), yet he humbled himself, and accepted the form of a slave, even to the most ignominious of deaths.

Both were utterly despised and rejected. Both were assumed by their own people and generation to be under the special curse of God, at the very time they were suffering for the sake of others. For we must recognize that Job's sufferings went far beyond himself, and were for universal instruction and comfort and guidance. It was not an aimless wager, when God staked all on Job's integrity, but an essential manifestation of the noble, vital, spiritual principle of faithful integrity for its own sake alone, under the extremist of testings: the *key to salvation*. We must do good simply because we love the good and hate the evil.

### MADE PERFECT BY SUFFERING

Both were "*made perfect by suffering*." This is a deep and important aspect in both cases. Christ, though of unblemished righteousness, was not "perfect" until he had, in loving and all-trusting obedience, passed through the required suffering and sacrificial death.

Job was the most righteous man of his day: a giant of faith and endurance—"perfect and upright," "*none like him in all the earth*," according to the testimony of God Himself (Job 1:8). Still, Job has something to learn, something in which to be developed and brought to beautiful fruition, as he at last freely and humbly confesses (40:4; 42:6).

Unquestionably, Job was a better, wiser, greater, more understanding man, much closer to God, after his terrible trial than before. And he had attained to a far higher position in the Divine Purpose and Manifestation. As a prosperous and honored sheik, he never would have fully known God. He never would have become an inspiration and example for all ages. He never would have been granted the unique and inestimable privilege of the direct Divine revelation he received.

### GOD'S UNIQUE SELF-MANIFESTATION TO JOB

Was ever a man the subject of so full and personal and searching a Divine address to himself? God did not deign to *explain*, for that would have been utterly inappropriate, and would not have accomplished the desired result. We must first *accept* God and all His ways fully and unquestioningly, before we can hope for any explanation of their mysteries.

But God condescended to take the time and trouble to fully and in detail manifest Himself and His majesty to Job, as He did to none other we know of but Christ himself. God's address to Job is unique in all Scripture.

Job at last received that which he had so passionately pleaded for: a direct divine manifestation. It would be well worth all the scorn and abuse and terrible suffering he had endured. Indeed, its value and power would be greatly heightened by that dark background. What a joyful,

glorious, inspiring, comforting memory for the last one hundred and forty years of his life!—a life which he thought was already over. How much closer he would now be to God for that long period of recompense for his trials! How much more at peace—for there are hints that for all his religious efforts and prosperity, he was not before truly at peace. In the anguish of his suffering, he makes such revelations as this:

*"That which **I GREATLY FEARED** is come upon me" (3:25).*

But never again would he fear anything. *Now* his peace was deep and strong. The ordeal was dreadful, but we see its wholesome benefits.

### JOB'S CRUSHING AVALANCHE OF AFFLICTION

Job's afflictions were many and cumulative. They would quickly have destroyed a lesser man. In evaluating Job and what he at times says, we must strive to comprehend the almost incomprehensible extent to which he was tortured and tried in so many ways at once.

First, he lost all his possessions and livelihood. In swift succession, calamity upon calamity fell crushingly upon him. And with it, he lost his whole family of ten beloved children in what was obviously a direct divine blow, unexplained and unprovoked: his cherished family for which he had constantly prayed and offered sacrifice.

His reaction was perfect, unhesitating, total acceptance and worship—

*"The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."*

Then, in seeming heartless response by God to this loving and godly reaction, he was smitten from head to foot—again obviously by the hand of God—with the most painful, loathsome and abhorred disease known to man, inevitably fatal in terrible suffering in the natural course of events: a particularly repulsive form of consuming, deforming leprosy, universally regarded as a manifestation of God's especial wrath.

Then his wife turned against him—and all his friends and acquaintances. And he found himself a universally abandoned pariah, cast out of the city, consigned to the refuse heap to die a lingering death: the butt of ridicule and abuse by the vilest class of the people, who tormented him for their depraved amusement.

Job was totally rejected, and driven "without the gate" by those who considered themselves the "Holy City."

In the raw meanness of ordinary human nature, everyone was gratified to see this mighty man, this presumed paragon of righteousness, crushed and humbled in the mire, and eager to add their own miserable quota to his overflowing misery. They spit in his face, he says. Exactly the same thing is said of Christ (Matt. 26:67): the deepest degradation and insult. "Crucify him! Crucify him! He pretended to be so good!" It was his very God-attested goodness that so enraged the blind evil fury of the flesh against him.

### THE FRIENDS COME

And so time dragged on wearily, with Job lying in misery in the ashes (2:8) (the Septuagint says "dung-heap," which is probably the meaning), until his three especial friends heard of his calamities, and assembled to comfort him. They were so struck with his misery and dreadful appearance that they sat around him in silence for seven days. Then, when he repeatedly implored their comfort and sympathy, they more and more heatedly condemned him and accused him of the vilest crimes and hypocrisies.

This is the background against which we must consider him. Truly, like Moses, under tremendous stress he "*spake unadvisedly with his lips*."

Job is throughout wrestling tremendously with this problem. Upon the shame and misery of his condition is heaped the smug and self-righteous condemnation of his closest friends. His friends' rejection aroused an over-reaction in what he said, but threw him more and more on God. He had sought their support and sympathy against the hand of God. They railed on him, thinking they were thereby earning God's favor. This added to his bitterness, but it showed him there was nowhere to turn for comfort and understanding but to God Himself.

The friends' condemnation was an essential part of the trial, and of the final result. Though it added immeasurably to his grief, it was probably more helpful to him (in a way opposite what they intended) than their sympathy would have been.

#### JOB'S GREATEST AGONY: GOD'S SEEMING REJECTION

*All forsook him in his extremity.* But his greatest agony was not in his sufferings, nor in his rejection by all mankind, but *God's* apparent rejection and forsaking and enmity. Again and again he implores God for but one word of hope or comfort or recognition, but is met with total silence, and increased oppression. Even when he seeks brief, exhausted surcease in sleep, he is terrified with awful dreams (7:14).

To judge what he says, we must consider *all* he said, and the order in which he said it; just as we must consider the whole of Psalm 22, and not just the first few words from it that Christ quoted on the cross. It is all too easy to get his cries of anguish out of proportion, as if they were the studied and final conclusions reached coolly and theoretically in ease and comfort.

The fundamental fact is that Job held fast his trust in God, and would not deviate from his dedication to righteousness (which has no meaning outside of faith in God); and he was confident throughout of final resurrection, and of God's open manifestation to him at last.

There is no more triumphant victory of faith than is expressed in his memorable words, wrung from him in the depth of present despair—

*"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him ... He also shall be my salvation!"*

*"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee. Thou wilt have a desire (kasaph: longing) to the work of Thine hands."*

**"I KNOW** *that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day* **UPON THE EARTH** *... Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold"* (13:15-16; 14:14-15; 19:25-27).

## WHY SUCH DREADFUL AFFLICTION?

His complaints are not against God's *overall* justice, but against His seeming injustice in the affairs of this life—especially that one who tried so hard to obey should be picked out for the most terrible of afflictions, while all men gloated, and the wicked were at ease. Job knew that at last all would be righted, but why this special, dreadful, unprovoked affliction of a righteous and faithful man?

The friends fall silent. Job restates his case at length (chapters 26-31) with great power and beauty: conceding that the wicked are finally punished; conceding God's infinite might and understanding; conceding that man's whole wisdom is to fear God and depart from evil— but again long and stoutly declaring his own righteousness, and crying for the opportunity of debating his case with God, confident of victory.

Then a new figure enters, the young Elihu, who prepares Job for the final revelation from God. He introduces the idea that suffering is not only for punishment, as the friends contended, but has many uses in the love and wisdom of God: constructive loving discipline, directional chastisement of a Father, strengthening by training and rigor, manifestation and deepening of faith, purification—especially purification, making perfect. Suffering can and must lead to fuller understanding, and thus be a blessing. Job makes no attempt to answer Elihu.

## GOD SPEAKS

Then God speaks. It is notable that Job was given just what he asked: an opportunity to stand up to God and argue with Him, to show Him how He must be mistaken. But how swiftly Job's bold self-assurance fled before the mighty manifestation of God's infinite wisdom and power!

That God should deign to speak to man at all—especially to one calling His ways in question—is a tremendous condescension in itself, a tremendous and unique honor, and manifestation of love for Job.

As God spoke of the endless marvels of His Creation, Job shrank to nothing. Crushed in shame, he learned to rest totally and unreservedly in God, devastated by the sudden realization of the stupidity and presumption of daring to challenge God and question His ways.

When God brought Job to the comfort and peace of unquestioning love and trust, He thereby solved all Job's problems, even before He removed Job's afflictions. *Their* removal came later, *after* Job had waived all his complaints, and prostrated himself in loving worship.

God banished Job's questions, not by answering them, but by totally removing them from his concern. Job was wholly satisfied that whatever God did must be right, and must be rooted in love and wisdom.

God's answer was to give no answer, but to manifest a God so great that no answer was needed. To need an explanation and justification of anything God does is to have a degraded and unacceptable conception of God. He is infinitely above all question and accountability.

## MAN DARE NOT QUESTION GOD

Job was faithful and righteous above all his contemporaries, and completely, actively dedicated to good works, and to service to God and man. He demonstrated his firm and unshakable

endurance, and that he unselfishly loved goodness for goodness' sake alone. But he did not have the necessary total self-abasing humility and recognition of self-nothingness until he was crushed by the divine revelation. The learning of this was the supreme blessing of his entire experience.

The whole lesson of God's self-manifestation to Job is the limitless greatness of God, and the utter littleness of man. If God had stooped to explain Himself to Job before totally humbling him in the recognition of his nothingness, then God would have been conceding man's right to judge God and demand an answer for His ways. And this right, man must be made to fully realize, that he *just does not have*. It is absurd and unthinkable that puny little ignorant created man should for one *moment* question God, Who effortlessly maintains the numberless stars and galaxies in their myriad courses throughout the universe. What is weak, brief-lived, earth crawling man to question his Creator?

But when Job humbled himself, and cast away all self-importance, God graciously went much further to set Job's mind at perfect rest, and doubly compensated him for all his faithfully-borne suffering and shame. He totally vindicated and honored him before his self-righteous friends, and gave Job the joyful, forgiving privilege of being their mediator.

### RESTORATION

And then He justified Job before his whole community, and made him twice as rich as he had been before. After what Job had bitterly learned of the fickle respect and fellowship of *men* (who fled when he needed them, and came back shamelessly seeking his favor when he was restored), and had gloriously learned of the companionship of *God*, the riches and honor would mean little to him, except as an even greater opportunity to resume his former course of goodness and guidance and charity to others, succoring the needy and defending the oppressed.

Some have felt that the restoration of the temporal riches and honor detracts from the spiritual force of the story, which is otherwise played out on a wholly spiritual plane. Such think incorrectly, again unwisely judging God's ways. It was fitting and necessary—for the instruction of all Job's associates, and all since—to complete the picture by the double restoration of all he had lost.

And it brings the closing picture fully into harmony with the antitype. Job, in well-deserved riches and honor—after passing triumphantly through all his trials for the inspirational and instructional benefit of the race—rejoiced to see his sons and his sons' sons, in peace and prosperity.

So Christ, in eternal riches and honor, shall see his redeemed Seed: a holy, perfected "generation of the race"—

**"HE SHALL SEE OF THE TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL, AND BE SATISFIED."**

*"How unsearchable are God's judgments and His ways past finding out!"*