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JOB AND THE NATION ISRAEL

Third Study: Face To Face With The Lord

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The Book of Job reveals a victory but it is not the victory of man's remarkable reasoning, nor the victory of superior argumentation, but the blessed victory of faith (13:15). This triumph was not won in a moment nor by one leap, but in definite and progressive stages. When the last words of Job are given in chapter 31, his friends are still of their opinion and Job is still of his conviction. The problem is deadlocked, as it were. The argument of the book is summarized in 32:1-3. "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job." Then Elihu comes preparing the way for the words of the Lord which follow. We take his words as appropriate because the Lord utters no rebuke of him later. In a sense he is the answer to Job's burning desire that he might have a Daysman (mochiach, lit. an umpire, arbiter) to stand between God and himself (9:33).

The burden of Elihu's several addresses is : (1) God is infinitely and eternally greater than man in power. In view of this it behooves man to be in a place of submission before his Creator. (2) God is infinitely greater than man in wisdom. He has no need to detail His ways and plans to man, even if man could understand them (33:13). Man does best (when he awaits God's solution which He alone can give and will give when it pleases him. (3) God is infinitely greater than man in righteousness. "Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should

commit iniquity. . . Yea, of a surety, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert justice" (34:10, 12). It is impossible for us fully to conceive how sinful it is for us to condemn the righteous and just God, or seek to maintain our righteousness at the expense of His. (4) God is infinitely greater than man in His tender mercy (Jas. 5:11). If we could understand the heart of God, we should be convinced that even in Our afflictions which He permits, His heart is most tender and compassionate toward us. After these addresses, God Himself appears. But He is not on the defensive, for He is responsible and amenable to none of His creatures.

JOB IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Neither the enemy nor the critics dealt properly with Job and his problem; that remains for God alone to do. Job had been afflicted inwardly and outwardly; now God intends to bless him inwardly and outwardly. God does this by asking Job well-nigh one hundred questions. (If one is ever inclined to feel quite exalted in his own mind, we suggest that he read through these questions. It is a most beneficial and deflating experience.) Suffice it to say, that Job failed in all his examination questions. But the result. was blessed, nevertheless. God revealed to Job the omnipotence and omniscience which are God's alone. Nowhere in the Bible have we a more marvellous delineation of the majesty and greatness of God. This revealed to Job his own ignorance (and of earthly, temporal things at that). Then God sets forth the impotence of Job. This was not done to show Job that His ways are totally inscrutable. If so, then why appear at all in this problem if not to solve it Himself? No, the portrayal of the frailty and weakness of Job is meant to given him a clearer conception of the glorious nature of his Creator.

Job's arguments showed that he had an imperfect, or rather an incomplete, view of God. The pivot and climax of the book are verses 5 and 6 of chapter 42. Job says: "I

had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is the height of the piety and faith of the afflicted one when brought to repentance. Job's righteousness was real, for God had boasted of it to Satan. But in the light of God it appeared as nothing. Such is the repentance of the righteous. He might try to clear himself before men; before God this was impossible. The vision of God had turned hearsay into clear vision. Hearsay is that which is taught us, what we receive by tradition or instruction, what might be termed the letter of the truth. (We dare not press this out of bounds, for Job did utter words of faith and truth in chapters 13 and 19). Vision, on the other hand, is that view which is unclouded, undimmed, untrammelled sight, having the eye filled to overflowing with the knowledge of God. That Job did not know God in all the perfection of His Being is clear from the view of God that he now expresses. It is direct and soul-searching experiences together with the realization of God's power, majesty, holiness, love, and goodness that turn hearsay into vision. He sees clearly now that what he had mistaken for the seizure of an enemy was the firm grasp of a friend, and what he thought was the weapon of a foe was the careful and skillful physician who only cuts to heal. The skilled physician may hurt, but he does not injure. Is this not true of our God?

By God's appearing to Job he learnt himself. Once having seen God he sees himself. He sees himself in all his impurity. When the seraphim stand before God they veil their faces before His holiness. When Isaiah saw the Lord he saw his own unclean lips and said, "Woe is me!" When Paul saw Christ he fell to the ground as dead. When Peter saw Christ he said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." When John saw the Lord he said, "I fell at his feet as dead." In God's sight all our comeliness is turned into corruption; in His purity and whiteness all on earth is polluted and blackness of darkness. To see God as infinite

is to see ourselves as finite. To see Him as perfect is to bring us forcibly to our imperfection. To know Him as all-knowing, the summation of all wisdom, is to realize our ignorance. To acknowledge Him as right is to own ourselves as wrong. To view His holiness is to be smitten with our own sin and contamination. Submission, contrition, and humility should then follow. Job, then, comes forth with a clearer vision of God, a discrediting of self, a rejecting of self-righteousness. When the spiritual and the inward has been cared for, then God showers upon the patriarch the temporal and the outward. He becomes the channel of blessing through his intercession for his friends who had so grievously maligned him, such intercession surely a humiliating thing for them. "And Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: and Jehovah gave Job twice as much as he had before." Job's enemy dealt ill with him; his friends dealt with him as best they could; it is God who ever and always deals best with us. How true, then, the words of the apostle James, "ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end [the final experience that came into the life of Job by the Lord's command and direction] of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful."

ISRAEL IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

That blessedness which was the portion of Job in the presence of God, meeting Him face to face, will be the experience of Israel in a coming day. Zechariah predicts: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of Supplications; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born" (12:10). In that selfsame time "there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (13:1). Job, looking unto God, saw his own undone condition and was cleansed; Israel will see the returning Hope of Israel and

will be fully cleansed. Then shall come to pass the words of Jeremiah: "In those days, and in that time, saith Jehovah, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant" (50:20). How glorious will be the lot of God's ancient people when Israel is without iniquity and Judah without sins! By the appearing of the Lord to Job, he came to know God as never before; when God appears to Israel, they shall know Him as never before. God's law will be implanted in their hearts after such a fashion, that they will not need to teach their neighbor in the knowledge of the Lord, for they shall all know Him from the least of them to the greatest (Jer. 31:31-34).

By coming face to face with the Lord they will finally understand and know themselves. They will repent in deep sorrow, mourning, and contrition. They will throw to the bats and to the moles all their vaunted self-righteousness. As with Job, their former knowledge of God will appear shallow in comparison with the light of that hour. Job was seeking after God and found Him; so will Israel.

The hour of Job's deliverance was one of the most intense pain, and mental and spiritual anxiety. Such will be the case with Israel. Regathered and settled in the land, the eyes of the confederacies of the Gentile nations will be attracted to her. The confederacy in the north of Europe, that in the south of Europe (the revived Roman empire with its ten kingdoms), that of the kings of the sun-rising, and the king of the north of Palestine will sweep down upon the defenseless land with rapacity and avarice, to make of her a spoil. Zechariah foretold that all the nations would be gathered together against the holy city of Jerusalem to make war with her. Israel has had many a dark hour in her national history; this will be the worst of all and the culmination of them all. She will have her time of trouble and trial but God's Word is sure that she will be saved out of it (Jer. 30:7).

Israel will then, as Job, know increased prosperity as never before. "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein. . . grain shall make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins" (Zech. 2:4, 5; 9:16, 17). That will be the time when Israel will become a channel of blessing to others. First Job was blessed, then his friends through him. The order is the same with Israel and the Gentiles. As Psalm 67 puts it: when Jehovah blesses Israel, it will follow that all the ends of the earth will fear Him. Israel will enter actually into the fulfillment of God's original purpose for her--a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:5, 6). Ten men out of all the languages of the nations shall lay hold of the Jew and desire to go with him, recognizing that God is with him. Job is a wonderful character; Israel is a remarkable people; but oh, how blessed is God above all! He is ready to forgive and pardon and receive. This God is our blessed, daily portion.

The problem of Job is solved; that of Israel will be too. Then it will be seen that afflictions try piety as well as iniquity. Trials develop faith. Hardships lead to clearer! views of God. Tribulations draw the soul nearer to God. What was formerly considered an unbearable burden is seen to be an abiding blessing. What matters it, then, if God permit us to be delivered into the hands of the enemy, or allow us to be subjected to the vitriolic ministrations of physicians of no value, as long as at the end of it all we may have that meeting with Him face to face, to minister to our every need? Thrice blessed be God for Himself and for His all-sufficient provisions!

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