

Department of English Bible Exposition
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THE BOOK OF JOB

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Editor's Note: This article was Written as a class paper in the Bible at the Evangelical Theological College last year, having been submitted to the Professor, Dr. Henry A. Ironside, who recommended it for publication. Mr. Feinberg, a Hebrew Christian, took his academic degree at the University of Pittsburgh, and is a candidate for the Th.M. degree in May.

The Book of Job has been so designated because of its principal character, Job. In the Hebrew canon it stands among the Hagiographa or Holy Writings. In our canon it is placed among the poetic books. Unlike the Pentateuch or the Prophets which are read in the synagogue every Sabbath, or even the Megilloth or rolls (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, and Lamentations) which are read on certain festive occasions, the Book of Job is not read in the synagogue. It is usually the more educated class that reads the book because of the lofty and difficult Hebrew. The authorship of the book has been and still is disputed. Many think it was written by Moses.

The book is set as to time in patriarchal days. There is no indication anywhere that the law or the great social, legislative, ecclesiastical, and judicial system brought in by it, were in existence at the time; the law, as such, is not mentioned. What makes it particularly difficult to place the book in point of time is the fact that there are no references to outside contacts with either political or ecclesiastical events. As to place, the story takes place in the land of Uz, which is southeast of Palestine on the borders of Edom. The Rabbis tell us that it occurred outside of Palestine that it might never be said that God persecuted a righteous man in Israel. It appears, however, that the impression given by its setting in Uz is more of an international, or rather intercommunal, outlook. It is interesting to note, in

fact, that throughout the book the names for God are for the most part Elohim, Eloah, and Shaddai. These are used in God's dealings with all peoples; Jehovah is more particularly used in God's redemptive and covenant relations.

There are eight characters in the book: God, Satan, Job, his wife, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, and Elihu the Buzite. God appears as the sovereign Ruler of His creation who delights in His saints and seeks their justification and vindication, whether in the sight of Satan or of Job's friends. We see "that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (Jas. 5 :11). Satan is still the accuser of God's saints before Him. He uses his old tactics as he did in the garden: by casting doubts through questions. Needless to say, this is of none effect with the Almighty God. Job, the main character, is a man "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil," according to the testimony of the Lord. He was said by some of the Rabbis to have lived in the time of Abraham. Others said he lived in the time of Jacob and married Jacob's daughter Dinah. Still others held he was a righteous Gentile who lived shortly after the time of Jacob and (on what authority it is hard to tell) was smitten with his great malady because he advised Pharoah to cast all the male infants born in Israel into the river. Setting aside these fantastic speculations, from the book itself we learn that Job was "the greatest of all the men of the east." He possessed much wealth and was highly honored in his city. Listen to him as he describes it so vividly: "I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil; When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared .my seat in the street! The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that

cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy" (Job 29 '6-13). Job's wife, who comes into view in 2:9 only, appears to be impetuous and unreflective; she is hasty in her judgments and foolish in her advice. Then there are Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Eliphaz is one noted for his sagacity and practical wisdom. He is much more calm than the others, and appeals to experience. Bildad has gained his knowledge from the accumulated lore of tradition. Zophar is an out-and-out legalist and a dogmatist as well. The last character to be mentioned is Elihu the Buzite who appears to be respectful in his manners, waiting for the others older than himself to speak before he cared to voice his opinions. He is less harsh than the rest and really shows insight into the situation perplexing Job and his friends.

The subject matter of the book is dramatic and the whole resolves itself into a continuous narrative. Along with the Psalms and Proverbs it is the only other book in the Old Testament that the Massoretic scholars pointed in such a way as to show its poetic form. Except for the prologue (chapters 1 and 2) and the epilogue (ch. 42:7-17) the form is that of the Hebrew poetry with the couplets. In the latter half of some of the couplets we have a reiteration of what has been expressed previously, but in others we have the opposite expressed, the antithetic parallelism. This latter form, to be sure, is more marked in the Psalms and Proverbs than in Job. The production as a whole and in all its parts is beautiful for its lofty style, its vivid pictures, and its reproductions of natural scenes and objects; it abounds in figures. This book has always held a high place in Biblical literature; so much so in fact, that the critics have placed its writing in the time of the literary prophets, Amos and Isaiah for instance. In contents the book has passages which are parallel to others in the Bible. Job 3:3-8: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is

a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning," reminds us quite distinctly of similar words by Jeremiah in Jer. 20:14-18: "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow that my days should be consumed with shame?" Job 7:17, 18: "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit I him every morning, and try him every moment?" brings to mind the words of the psalmist David in Psalm 8:4: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

In order to get a closer and more satisfactory view of the book, its subject matter, purpose, and problem involved, let us look into the story as it is related to us. At the outset Job is seen living in comfort and in the fear of the Lord as was his wont, and surrounded by his ten children. His zeal for God is seen in his sacrifice of burnt offerings for his sons after their days of feasting, lest they might have offended God in a moment when they were susceptible to temptation. Then we are introduced into a scene where the sons of God presented themselves before Him and Satan came also. When

Satan was asked whence he had come he said: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." This is true of him today for we know that our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5 :8). It has been well said that although Satan, by his experiences, is much wiser than when he was first created, yet in his consistent and constant opposition against God he still uses his same tactics. We must not be ignorant of any of his devices. When the Lord delighted Himself in Job and said to Satan: "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil," Satan malignantly asked: "Doth Job fear God for nought?" By this Satan was by so much arraigning God for His control of affairs, so that it paid one to serve Him; on the other hand, it was reflecting upon Job as being one who desired to serve God merely for gain. God then allows Satan to try Job with the command that he touch not the person of Job. What a comforting thought that although the Lord uses means (Satan and others) to chasten His saints, the means are ever in His control and He watches over us until His will in us be accomplished! When We are tempted or tried we need never fear that God has left us or forsaken us. He knows His own and cares most tenderly for them. There is sweetness to be found in Him through chastisement, be it as severe as it may. In his first attack upon Job, Satan uses the Chaldeans and the Sabeans to strip Job not only of his wealth, but of his children as well. Yet in "all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." When Satan had failed the first time, he answered God when God asked him concerning righteous Job: "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." So God allowed Job to be tested further by the infliction by Satan upon Job of a loathesome disease. When Satan saw he had failed here, he appears to have used Job's wife to advise him to do what Satan

said he would, namely: "curse God, and die." Yet "in all this did not Job sin with his lips."

If the purpose of the book were to show how God can defeat Satan and sustain His saints in trial it might very well end at this point. But the Lord has much more in view than this. Job must yet come to an honest estimate of himself. There were in him elements of character, self-justification and self-righteousness, which had not been called forth into display because circumstances had not evinced them. Job must recognize them, judge them, and repent. But, you ask, was not Job a perfect and righteous man? Just so; and it is here that God would show us that the best of us has nothing to boast of, but needs repentance and self-judgment.

With this in mind let us take up the trend of the narrative. Job's friends had come to visit him in his sore distress. We must remember that they are mere auxiliaries in God's hands and our attention must be centered upon Job. It appears that Job could more easily bear his sorrow alone without his silent friends sitting about him. Perhaps the contrast in their condition and his was irksome and distasteful to him. Then he begins to speak and curses the very day of his birth. Eliphaz seeks to comfort Job by referring to facts that he had culled from his experiences. He uses his favorite words--"I have seen"--time and time again. He intimates very mildly that the trouble is in Job and that he should commit his cause to the Lord, for "who ever" perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" Job, however, is not satisfied with this answer to his problem and asks to be taught wherein he has erred, for he claims he is as able as any to "discern perverse things." Bildad answers next and maintains that tradition has ever shown that the punishment of God is upon the wicked and that "the hypocrite's hopes shall perish." Job refuses the application of this principle to himself and bemoans the fact that he has not one to plead for him with God: "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us,

that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9 :32,33); and further: "O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour!" (Job 16:21). But blessed be God that we know: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8 :34), and "he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7 :25). For "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). Then we have the advice of Zophar who restricts God's dealings to hard and fast legalistic principles. He invites Job to "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth." An exacting God! how unfair to Him! But Job is still not convinced. And thus the contention goes on throughout the greater part of the book with Job's friends condemning him and he trying to vindicate and comfort himself. Instead, they should have tried to comfort him, so that he would have been brought to self-condemnation. In Job's last answer (chapters 30, 31, and 29) to his "miserable comforters" and their intimations that he was a hypocrite while he contended his righteousness and showed glimpses of great faith (19:25-27), we have Job wishing for the blessing of former days: "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me" (29:2). But could not God bless him now also? How like so many of us! When we are undergoing trials and perplexities we forget the troubles of the past and the grace that was daily vouchsafed abundantly to us, and we long and sigh for "the good old days." Our God is abundantly able to renew His grace to us day by day and refresh us in the inner man with His heavenly manna from His tender hand. But Job continues in his reminiscences concerning his past honor and dignity. Can we not feel his mental anguish and troubled heart as he says "But now"? How Job laments his fate! Can we not the more then adore Him who when He "was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his

mouth! He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers IS dumb, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7). And all for us! How our hearts and lives should go out to Him in adoration, praise, and grateful service! If Job could only have said: "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Mt. 11:26). But he continues on in this vein: "If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot hath hasted to deceit; Let me be weighed in an even balance that God may know mine integrity" (31:5, 6). It has been well said by Dr. E. J. Pace that there are pride of race, pride of place, pride of face, but worst of all is pride of grace. The spiritual Christian can NEVER find anything in himself whereof he can glory, for "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (I Cor. 1:31). In chapter 31 and verse 40 we read "The words of Job are ended." How different is this ending from the one we find in Psalm 72:20: "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended"! In the former case Job had been assiduously attempting to justify himself rather than God; in the latter David had been praising the Lord for His abundant mercies and His wondrous works. How much more honoring to God are "the prayers" of His saints than "the words" of His saints.

Elihu, who had been from all appearances a witness to these accusations and refutations, now speaks and rebukes the friends of Job for their inapplicable and false principles and their misrepresentations of the character and dealings of God. Nor does he excuse Job in his contentions. He is God's temporary answer to Job's desire for a Daysman. Elihu delivers himself of a commendable theodicy, and at the same time he shows sympathy and kindness for Job in his plight. The gist of his argument may be summed up thus: Behold, in this thou are not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters" (33:12,13). And: "far be it from God, that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity" (34:10). Does it not remind us of Paul's words in

Romans 9:20: "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Finally, God out of the whirlwind answers Job and shows Job his utter insignificance in contrast to His greatness in all His workings. Job replies at first: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth" (40:4). But Job has more to learn yet. In his second answer he says: "I have 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" (42:5, 6). How like Isaiah this is who when he saw the Lord delivered himself similarly as the Word records: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). Job had come now to the place where he knew the potency of the truth: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18).

Thus far, in the words of James, we have seen "the patience of Job." Now we see also "the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (Jas. 5:11). After Job offered sacrifices for his three friends according to the command of God, we read: "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice

as much as he had before" (42:10). How blessed is that word "when"! Is It not true that Just when we are striving in prayer with God for others that He so graciously and abundantly blesses us also? And can we not find for our own hearts and lives an application of this book in the words of the apostle Paul: "For if we judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (I Cor. 11:31, 32)? Oh! that we might recognize in our trials and chastenings the good hand of the Lord and turning to Him in the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ call upon His grace in time of need!

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