

Department of  
Semitics, Old Testament and Archaeology

## **JOB AND THE NATION ISRAEL**

First Study: In the Hands of the Enemy

BY CHARLES LEE FEINBERG, TH.D.

### INTRODUCTION

This book is named after its chief character, Job, which means "persecuted" or "afflicted." In our canon it is the first of the poetic books of the Old Testament. Although the book is poetry the story is not fiction but fact (cf. Ezek. 14:14, 20; Jas. 5:11). The events must have taken place in patriarchal times for (1) there is no mention of the law; (2) the offerings are burnt offerings and not sin offerings as required under the law; (3) Job performs the functions of a priest himself; and (4) no mention is made of the exodus from Egypt. The book is a work unsurpassed for depth of feeling and grandeur of thought and conception. Luther said of it: "Magnificent and sublime as no other book of Scripture." Renan, the author and critic of the past century, delivered himself as follows: "The Book of Job is the Hebrew book par excellence-it is in the Book of Job that the force, beauty, the depth of the Hebrew genius are seen at their best." Tennyson called it "the greatest poem of ancient or modern times." Carlyle said it was "apart from all theories about it, one of the greatest things ever written with pen. There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal merit."

The theme, subject, or problem of the book is the suffering of the godly. The suffering of the ungodly is no mystery. The psalmist said: "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days" (Psa. 55:23; cf. also Prov.

29:1). But why do the godly suffer? The book really deals with five problems that grow out of this main one and include it. (1) Can man serve God disinterestedly from pure love of Him or is all his worship of God tainted with ulterior and selfish motives? (2) Is there anyone but God to whom the control of the circumstances of human life can be attributed? (3) Are man's outward circumstances a criterion and standard of his moral character and life before God? (4) Can men, by their wisdom, rightly and completely comprehend the workings of the providence of God? (5) Since the righteous do endure such great afflictions in this life, is a life of righteousness worth it in the last analysis?

Scripture is so full in its truth that although there is but one interpretation, there may be many applications. This book in particular lends itself to several applications. By way of comparison with Job we can see the believer of this age exposed to himself by the dealings and chastenings of God, judging himself, mistrusting himself, resting in the all-sufficient grace of God. By way of contrast with Job we can see Christ, the sinless Sufferer, doing God's will without murmuring and with complete trust in the wisdom and will of the Father. By way of application we can discern in Job the whole story of the salvation of the sinner. An Englishman once said to Moody: "Did you ever notice this, that the Book of Job is the key to the whole Bible? If you understand Job you will understand the whole Bible!" "No," said Moody, "I don't comprehend that. Job the key to the whole Bible! How do you make that out?" He said: "I divide Job into seven heads. The first head is: A perfect man untried. That is what God said about Job: that is Adam in Eden. He was perfect when God put him there. The second head is: Tried by adversity. Job fell, as Adam fell in Eden. The third head is: The wisdom of the world. The world tried to restore Job; the three wise men came to help him. That was the wisdom of the world centered in those three men. You cannot," he said, "find any such eloquent language or wisdom anywhere, in any part of the

world, as those three men displayed, but they did not know anything about grace, and could not, therefore, help Job."

"Then in the fourth place, in comes the Daysman, that is Christ. In the fifth place, God speaks; and in the sixth, Job learns his lesson. '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.' And then down came Job fiat on the dunghill. The seventh head is this, that God restores him. Our last estate is better than our first."

By way of comparison, still further, Job is a picture of the nation Israel. This thought we shall attempt to carry through our three studies. For our purposes and true to the movement of the book we divide Job into three sections: chapters 1-3 speak of the suffering Job; chapters 4-31 set forth the sophistries of his friends; chapters 32-42 reveal the salvation or deliverance of Job by the Lord.

### JOB IN HIS SUFFERING

First, let us note what kind of man Job was. Then let us consider his suffering, sorrow, and trial. This one delivered over into the hands of the enemy, Satan, was no ordinary man. He had wealth (cf. 1:3; 29:3, 6, 19). He knew the prosperity of the Lord. He was blessed with children (1:2). They are a heritage from the Lord. He was highly honored (29:7-11; 29:21-25). He was educated. He shows familiarity with writing, building, natural history, astronomy, and science in general. He was pious and godly (1:1, 5, 8; 2:3). He was perfect. This does not mean sinlessly perfect. He was perfect in the sense of complete as the word denotes (*tam*, from *tamam*, to be complete, whole). His godly life was well-rounded: not zealous in some things and lax in others. He was as honest in public as in private; he was as true with men as with God. He was upright, sincere, and straightforward, as we say "on the level." He feared God. God was the center of his life and desire. He lived in the presence of God. He turned away from evil, shunning every form of it. He was concerned for the spir-

itual well-being of his children (1:5). It was not spasmodic but a constant practice of his. This is brought out by two features of the original text: first, the words, "all the days," and secondly, the verb in the imperfect denotes that which is continuous and reiterated. He ever concerned himself for the needy (29:12-17).

Just as Job was an extraordinary man, so was his trial unusual at the hand of the enemy Satan. Job was tried in his circumstances or circumstantially, in his body or physically, and in his faith or spiritually. In these three spheres he was tested to the full. He lost all his wealth and property. He lost his children, dearer far than his riches. And all of this transpired with Satanic speed and suddenness. He lost his health. Someone has described it: "The disease of Job seems to have been an universal ulcer, producing an eruption over his entire person, and attended with violent pain and constant restlessness. A universal boil, or group of boils, over the body would accord with the (account of the disease in the various parts of the book. In the elephantiasis the skin is covered with incrustations like those of an elephant. It is a chronic and contagious disease, marked by a thickening of the legs, with a loss of hair and feeling, a swelling of the face, and a hoarse, nasal voice. It affects the whole body: the bones as well as the skin are covered with spots, and tumors, at first red, but afterwards black." Payson was asked, when under great bodily affliction, whether he could see any particular reason for such dealings of God with him. "No," he said, "but I am as well satisfied as if I could see ten thousand; God's will is the very perfection of all reason." So reasoned Job in his trial. Then Job lost the help and sympathetic understanding of his wife. Through all these tests Job stood firm and glorified God.

#### ISRAEL IN HER SUFFERING

What a parallel to these things does the nation Israel afford! She too was highly favored of God. God delighted in her. He called her the apple of His eye, His chosen,

His son. Yes, He even called her His Jeshurun (the same root word as "upright" used of Job), His upright one (Dt. 32:15; 33:5; 33:26; Isa. 44:2). She too was prosperous under the hand of God (Dt. 8:18). God gave her power to acquire wealth. Just as Satan resisted God's word of commendation and joy in Job, so has he done and still does with regard to Israel (Zech. 3:1 ff). God delivered Job permissively into the hands and devices of the enemy Satan for dreadful trials. In a similar manner God delivered over the dearly beloved of His soul into the hands of her enemies (Jer. 12:7). As Job was stripped of all, so was Israel also (Lam. 5:1-5). This is true in a greater measure today than it was in Jeremiah's day when he wrote the "Lamentations." Many were the waves and billows of woe that came over Job. How many and of what magnitude have they been that have swept over Israel and still engulf her in this hour! First, she was persecuted of Pharaoh upon arriving at nationhood. Then the nations on the wilderness journey, especially Amalek, vented their wrath on her. In later years Haman took up the cudgel of persecution against her to exterminate her. Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century before Christ joined himself to the number of those who can be called the inveterate and unrelenting enemies of Israel. The Middle Ages saw wave after wave of destruction break over the defenseless head of the nation of the weary foot and the weary heart. If thousands died in plagues from contaminated waters, it was Israel who had committed the dastardly deed, although many of her own number perished. If a Gentile child were found dead near the time of Passover, it was the community of God's people that had perpetrated the crime in order to have the blood for ritual purposes, although it was known that Israel turned with loathing from all blood in their ritual and in their food according to the explicit prohibitions of the Mosaic law. The long, sad, blood-stained story of the Spanish Inquisition has never been fully told and it were best passed over in some degree of silence. And what shall we

say of her present day privations, wanderings, and sorrows? And the end is definitely not yet. Israel's history has been one drawn-out concatenation of woes.

But we must realize what Job's friends had to learn and that is that not all suffering is retributive. God's greatest trials are inflicted upon the strongest for by His grace they are empowered to bear them. If Job had only known what God had said of him to Satan and how His heart went out to Job in his trial; if Israel only knew what God has said of her in His Word to Satan and all men and how His heart yearns for her! Here we have exemplified in a clear way the truth that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Satan in the last analysis strikes at God by implying that He can only be loved with a mercenary love and only for His benefits do human creatures feel drawn to Him. When the human heart really catches a glimpse of the love in the heart of God, it responds with love. "We love him, because he first loved us."

It is said that Spurgeon, while visiting at a friend's home in the country, was attracted to a beautiful weather-vane which the friend had placed upon the cupola of a new barn which had just been built. On the weather-vane were inscribed the words, "God is love." Spurgeon expressed surprise at the choice of such a motto for such a place and said, "What do you mean by putting that text of Scripture on the weather-vane? Do you mean that God's love is as changeable as the wind?" "Oh, no," said his friend, "I mean to say that God is love whichever way the wind blows." Job learned this truth; Israel as a nation will yet learn it. No matter what the trial, how deep the sorrow, how cutting the wound, how painful the disease, how loathesome the affliction, how unbearable the circumstances, God is always and ever love. And He chastens those He loves. In these first chapters we have seen that God permits the godly to suffer for the glory of God. In the remainder of the poem it is seen that the godly suffer for their own good as well.

What is as evident as the afflictions imposed by Satan upon Job is the protection afforded him by God. Satan in his venom could go only thus far and no farther. Throughout the centuries Satan has longed to blot out Israel but she knows God's protecting hand. It is said of Felix of Nola that when he was hotly pursued by murderers, he took refuge in a cave, and instantly over the rift of it the spiders wove their webs. Seeing the web the murderers passed by. Then said this saint, "Where God is not, a wall is but a spider's web; where God is, a spider's web is as a wall." How true for Job and how true for Israel!  
Dallas, Texas.

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Dallas, TX 75204  
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