

JOB AND THE NATION ISRAEL
Second Study: At the Mercy of the Critics

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(Continued from the October-December Number, 1939)

Most of the Book of Job is taken up with the addresses of Job's friends and his answers to them. They are not incidental to the book but are of primary importance. To view them otherwise is to lose sight of the great movement of the book. These friends attempt as best they can to probe Job's predicament. He does not understand the reason for his unusual sufferings nor do they. It is no small problem with which these men are wrestling. There is no book in the Bible that does not have some reference to trial. The Book of Psalms has one hundred and fifty psalms and over ninety have some reference to suffering. There is no believer in the Scriptures whose history we have in any fullness at all, but what was called upon to endure trouble and suffering in some form. Many times the most godly were the most tried. Let your mind review for the moment the lives of such men as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Paul, Peter, the early disciples and apostles. Did not each one find out experientially the truth of the words: "But man is born unto trouble, As the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Those who were greatly used of God were trained in the school of affliction and hardship.

JOB UNDER THE CRITICS' SCRUTINY

The friends of Job in trying to explain his afflictions really misrepresent God as well as Job, and so are Satan's tool to cause Job to renounce God. Job's heart feels it cannot accept their opinions as to the dealings of God with him. These friends, mark you, were prominent, wise, and pious men, men of age and experience. Their arguments were good and forceful, but they were based on wrong premises. Job refuses to admit the cogency of their arguments because he

knows of his own innocence of their charges against him. The arguments of Job's friends go from veiled insinuations to open denunciations. As the argument progresses the friends realize that they are unable to convince him, and they become more and more harsh and severe. They begin mildly but are astonished that Job tries to refute some of their primary arguments, and finally they lose confidence in his uprightness and sincerity. Instead of applying a balm, wine, and oil to his wounds, they cauterize them, pouring in vitriol. It is always like vinegar on soda to come to a broken soul and dejected spirit prattling about platitudes without sympathy.

The main contention of Job's friends was that suffering is for sin. This is true in general but far from true in all cases. As a matter of fact, Job's sufferings were not the result of sin so much as they were the trial of his righteousness, the trial of his faith. His friends reasoned that something grievous must be the matter with Job and because they could not see it, they concluded he was a hypocrite hiding his sin and his real self. Job's friends made him writhe more than Satan. They did him more harm than the devil. When Job knew his friends were wrong in their contentions, he was stirred to resentment against them. Throughout the words of the friends there is special pleading--they do not state the whole case at all. His friends were merely speaking truths they had learned from memory; he spoke his words from a tortured and anguished and agonizing heart. Though his comforters, miserable as they were, pelted him with inconsiderate words he had more faith than anyone of them (Job 13:15).

Let us note the trend of reasoning of each adviser. Eliphaz the Temanite held that all men are sinners and sin is connected with suffering. He does not at first doubt the sincerity of Job nor his integrity. He says: "Remember, pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the upright cut off?" (4:7). His principle is true in general, but does not explain special suffering. What of the

case of Abel? Was he not upright and righteous and did he not perish, being cut off by the hand of his murderous brother? The other friends seem to get their point of departure from Eliphaz, and follow his reasoning, but more and more cast doubts on the piety of Job. He appeals again and again to his own observation and experience. Notice "as I have seen" in 4:8 and "I have seen" in 5:3 together with the recital of his vision in his dream recorded in 4:12 ff. See also 15:17. When he speaks in his second address he charges Job with guilt. He sets forth his indictment thus: "Yea, thou doest away with fear, And hinderest devotion before God. For thine iniquity teacheth thy mouth, And thou choosest the tongue of the crafty. Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I; Yea, thine own lips testify against thee" (15:4-6). In his third and last address he administers a scathing rebuke to Job accusing him of downright wickedness. Hear the severity of his words: "Is not thy wickedness great? Neither is there any end to thine iniquities" (22:5 ff). He goes on to charge Job with stripping the naked of their clothing, with withholding water from the weary and bread from the hungry, with turning away widows with emptiness, and with robbing the fatherless of their maintenance and stay. Think of it! Contrast this, if you will, with the statement God made concerning Job at the outset of the book and with Job's own recital of his former days in 29:11-13; 31:16-23. Carrying Eliphaz's argument to its logical conclusion, we should find that the most sinful men were the most afflicted.

Bildad the Shuhite appeals to tradition. He orders his argument after this manner: "For inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, And apply thyself to that which their fathers have searched out (For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, Because our days upon earth are a shadow): Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, And utter words out of their heart?" (8:8-10). Tradition is just the observation of a number of men, and many times is no more correct than individual observation. He should have appealed to an ob-

jective norm and standard, God's own revelation to man, in that measure in which God had already made Himself known in that day. In his second address Bildad prefaces his words with the statement: "Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, And the spark of his fire shall not shine" and goes on to enumerate the multiplied calamities and adversities that assuredly befall the wicked. His last answer to Job is quite brief and he contents himself with admonishing Job that man can by no means be pure and just before God when even the stars are not pure in His sight (Chapters 18; 25).

Zophar the Naamathite is the third friend and he feels he must speak forth his word of consolation and comfort also. He appeals to the law principle (not the law of Moses for it was not yet given). He states his position thus: "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (11:6). If God were an exacting God, where would sinful man be? The Psalmist asks this same question: "If thou, Jehovah, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psa. 103:3). In his second and last address Zophar points out that the triumphing of the wicked is short and that he perishes forever like his own dung (20:5-7). He closes summarily with the words: "This is the portion of a wicked man from God, And the heritage appointed unto him by God" (20:29). He is quite severe and denunciatory in his charges as one would expect of a legalist. Boiling down the words of a legalist to the basic residuum, we shall always find him saying, "It's good for you that you are in such a plight. You are getting just what you deserve and even less. You have no cause to complain."

All these men based God's infliction of suffering, or permission of it, on a basis of justice (for sin) rather than on a basis of love. They were miserable comforters (16:2) and physicians of no value (13:4); they did give the impression that they were the people and wisdom would die with them (12:2). How like so many critics of our day are these critics! Their criticisms too often are the opposite of the truth.

Satan's afflictions were sore, but the criticisms of Job's friends were far worse.

ISRAEL UNDER THE CRITICS' SCRUTINY

Since Israel has been suffering for centuries she has not lacked for critics, self-appointed, self-sustained, and assuredly self-opinionated, to tell her the reason for her trials. Zechariah gives a timely word here. In the first chapter of his prophecy, after noting the lessons for post-captivity Israel in the history of their forefathers' disobedience and punishment, he declares God's love and jealousy for Israel. God says through the prophet: "And I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction" (1:15). It is as though a father were reluctantly punishing his own child with a stick or with a word of rebuke or restraint and a stranger came to chasten with a rod of iron. God scattered Israel (Jer. 31:10), but the nations made them how] (Isa. 52:5). Isaiah tells Babylon: "I was wroth with my people, I profaned mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke" (47:6). The contrast that the prophet draws between God's treatment of Israel and the dealings of the nations with the chosen people is marked. The critics of Israel ask: "Have not the trials of the Jews been minutely predicted by Moses and the prophets?" This question goes on the false assumption that God sanctions all that he predicts. By the same token God must approve of all wars for Christ said there would be wars and rumors of wars. Too, the sufferings of Christ were detailed]y foretold, but still the Holy Spirit notes that it was with "wicked hands" (implying responsibility) He was crucified and slain. Some say: "It is too bad the poor Jews have to suffer, but they have it coming to them." On the same ground, which one of us, apart from grace, does not have infinitely more "coming to us?" Then, again, what of the saved Jews in the present suffering in Europe? (We

understand that with saved Gentiles they form the body of Christ, but to the persecuting unsaved world all Jews are alike.) Will not the remnant of the tribulation time suffer though they be righteous? (Cf. the imprecatory psalms). Would the critics say that these godly ones have it coming to them also? Many are satisfied in their thinking, that the Jews are suffering because they have objectionable traits, personal and otherwise. Is not this the same method that Job's friends used? Because these critics do not understand the real reason they feel they must find any petty reason to offer as cause for Israel's trials. Those who lay their sufferings to the crucifixion of Christ feel they have solved the problem satisfactorily. Let it be understood that no words of man can in the least mitigate the guilt that attaches to Israel for the rejection of Christ as noted in the gospel narratives. But are there not features worth noting in this regard? Do not the words of Christ, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" have some bearing on the question? The list of culprits in Acts 4 :27 is also illuminating. Still others say that the very plight of Israel proves that they are so sinful God never chose them as His people. If God did not choose them when He said the words of Isaiah 44:1, 2, then He never chose any, believer today when He says, "he chose us in him before: the foundation of the world." We are aware that the choice of Israel is national to earthly privilege and that of the believer is individual to heavenly privilege, but we are speaking now only of the surety and certainty of the divine, sovereign choice. How unfair and cruel and inhumane and unfeeling and harsh, yea, almost savage and barbarous, have been many of the criticisms against Israel! She knows full well how Job felt when pelted with unfeeling words from self-styled physicians.

St. Augustine tells the story of the man who complained to Almighty God about a neighbor, saying, "O Lord, take away this wicked person !" And God said, "Which?" How foolhardy to judge without the mind of God! He shall bring

to light the hidden things, so we can afford to refrain from the act of judging the suffering and the tried. May God grant that we shall not be found in the role of critic or judge of His suffering people Israel!

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JOB'S VICTORY

Job's hour of victory came. The sorrow which endured through the long night was followed by the morning of light and triumph, and up from that ash heap of pain rose the loftiest note of the Old Testament: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me" (19 :25-27). . . . If Job had said nothing else, that sentence alone would lift him among the stars.

--Cox. *Lives That Remind Us*, p. 49.

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