

The Book of Job

by C.I. Scofield

C.I. Scofield's sermon on the Book of Job explores the profound question of why the godly suffer and emphasizes the purifying purpose of such trials in the life of believers.

Scripture: Ezekiel 14:14, Matthew 4:4, John 15:1, Hebrews 12:11, James 5:11

Topics: "Human Suffering", "Divine Providence"

Description

C.I. Scofield delves into the book of Job, acknowledging the need for limitations in studying its vast content and focusing on the panoramic view of the book. He refutes claims that Job is a work of imagination, emphasizing its discussion on man's accountability to God. The central problem of Job is explored - why do the godly suffer? The interactions between Job, his wife, and his three friends represent different perspectives on human suffering and the role of God in it, leading to a divine solution that brings forth double fruitfulness and a higher form of service.

Transcript

If we are to do anything with such a book as Job within the compass of one hour, it is evident that we must accept certain limitations. Obviously it will be impossible to make a close study of its forty-two chapters of human reasoning and divine revelation. Evidently, we are shut up to a panoramic view of the book. Our study must bear the same relation to the book that an artist's sketch does to the finished landscape. But even a sketch may be accurate; may indicate faithfully, and in due proportion, the greater features of the landscape, and that with God's help we may hope to do.

The critical studies of the day have raised certain questions about this book to which we may for a moment give attention. We are told that Job is a work of the imagination, and that it belongs to a comparatively late period in the Hebrew commonwealth. Against that contention it is only necessary to say that it rests upon mere literary opinion, without a shred of proof. But a conclusive answer is found in the book itself. It is a book, as you know, in which the whole question of the accountability of man as a morally responsible being to a holy God is elaborately discussed. Now in that discussion the ten commandments, the Mosaic revelation concerning priesthood and sacrifice, and the mighty writings of the prophets are never once mentioned. And not only so, but the thoughts of the speakers have no coloring from them. Even Jehovah does not appeal against Job to His statutes. We say, therefore, that the book is what it assumes to be--it goes back of Moses to primitive, patriarchal times. It may even antedate the flood.

That Job is an historical personage we know from the inspired use of his name in James v:11, and Ezekiel xiv:14, 20. Indeed, these references to the troubled patriarch show the truth of the principle laid down--that if the law existed as a divine revelation when Job was written, it would have been impossible to keep its shadow off the book.

Turning now to the book itself we ask ourselves as to its central problem. Here we have no difficulty. The central question discussed and answered in Job is, why do the godly suffer? It is an ever-living question, for the godly still suffer--and often, as in Job's case, with no apparent cause. Our suffering brothers are better than we, and yet they are bereaved while our families remain unbroken, are ill while we are well, are diminished in estate while we prosper. Why?

Incidentally, almost the whole sphere of man's relation to God is brought into the discussion. And let us remember that all this is not set out in a dogmatic way, essay fashion. It is not an academic discussion. A living man, bereft of children, estate, and health is the subject of it.

Next, let us think of the literary form of the book. I need not remind you that in that book which is at once the only divine and the most truly human of writings, the Bible, the Holy Spirit uses every form of literary expression. It has history, biography, autobiography, and revelation, and these in prose, poetry and drama. Job is a drama. I do not mean that the story of Job was cast into that form, but that it all occurred in that form.

There are two scenes, one supra-mundane, the other on the earth. Of the first we have no description; the second is the ash heap outside an Oriental town.

In the first scene Jehovah and Satan are the dramatispersonæ.

Open to the first chapter, sixth verse: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them." Oh! the mystery of the permitted presence of Satan in the presence of God! The accuser of the brethren began this work very early in the history of the race. "And the Lord said unto Satan, whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and from in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job?" Here is the character of Job as described by the Lord Himself.

"There is none like him in the earth." The best man God had! "A perfect and an upright man." Now the word "perfect" here is the same word we have in the seventeenth of Genesis, when Abram gets that marvelous revelation of El Shaddai when He says: "Walk before Me and be thou perfect." "And Abram fell on his face." The word simply means unmixed, sincere. It does not mean fully sanctified, or dead to sin, but it means not double minded. It is the equivalent of what the Lord said of Nathaniel, "An Israelite in whom there is no guile." And this is Job. "Hast thou considered my servant Job, for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil."

Do not imagine, dear friends, that in the last chapter of this book you have the conversion of that patriarch. He is God's man from the beginning of the book, and the best man God has on earth.

"Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he

hath, and he will renounce thee to thy face."

That was Satan's theory about Job's godliness. Men are good because it pays men to be good. Satan would perhaps resent it, but I have no doubt that he is the author of that proverb "Honesty is the best policy." I think it came straight out of the pit. I hate to hear Christians talk that kind of talk. We are honest to please Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light; because it is blessed, not because it is politic--neither is it always politic.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord." But this gives us no light, we say, this deepens the darkness of the problem. Why do the godly suffer?

Yes, God Himself sometimes puts His dearest children into Satan's sieve. "Satan hath desired to have thee," said Christ to Peter, "That he might sift thee like wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." We have here the same thing. Satan is suffered to have the same power over circumstances of our lives. That is one fact of revelation and it is terrible. But invariably, along with it is another fact of revelation: the power of Satan is strictly and absolutely limited by the power of God, and it is comforting. And another fact of revelation: Satan is never permitted to work destructively upon the children of God. Christ put Peter into Satan's sieve, but He Himself fixed the time and way of Peter's death. (John xxi:18, 19.)

Then you know what happened. Everything went but Job's health. Satan's worst enmity, at that stage of things, could not have touched that patriarch's body, but only what he had.

"Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and fell down upon the ground and worshipped; and he said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

How many a saint of God has found those words helpful to express what the heart wanted to say, but in its anguish, could not find the words. It is a great thing to see it is the Lord. Job does not say, "Satan hath taken away." Instrumentally, he did, undoubtedly, but he does not say "Satan hath taken." When Paul was in the prison of Nero he did not call himself "the prisoner of Nero," but "the prisoner of the Lord." He knew that Nero could have no power over him but by his Lord's will. Then we have another of these interviews in the second chapter.

"Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil; and he still holdeth fast his integrity although thou movedst me against him to destroy him without cause."

"And Satan answered the Lord and said. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." What a lie that is, too! See the martyrs in the flames! Will they give all that they have, their trust in God, to save their lives when by burning a little pinch of incense on the flame before the image of Caesar they could go free, but they will not burn it! they burn themselves instead? Yes, that is the devil's lie. "But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face."

Satan has a contemptible opinion of humanity, and I do not wonder. It is, only God who says, "I will make a man more precious than gold." Satan despises man and hates man because God has redeemed him.

And man puts such a poor estimate upon himself. He sells out so cheaply. Down South, where I lived before the war, \$800 to \$2,000 was the price of a man. I have known a good many white men sell out a great deal cheaper than that.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; only spare his life." You see the two things involved? Satan cannot kill that man. Do you suppose anything can kill a child of God until God is ready to take Him? He is immortal until His Father says, "Come home." There is a word in that first chapter of Revelation concerning Christ: "I am He that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hades and of death." He has the keys. Satan cannot open the door of death for you or for me. It cannot open until Christ opens it. Blessed be God, we are not subject to all kinds of happenings.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand, only spare his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat among the ashes."

And now we come to the second scene in this drama. Wonderful words are said by, and above, that ash heap. Five persons beside Job come upon the scene where the afflicted patriarch sits desolate and anguished.

First of all comes his wife. Her counsel is brief: "Curse God and die."

Why do we smile at that? The whole world does. Why-do we never think of a broken-hearted mother bereaved of her children, bereft of her home, and sore with her unavailing yearning over her stricken husband? She says her bitter word, and passes. For one I am glad that motherhood comes to her again; that once more she holds babes to her heart. I have no disposition to make fun of Job's wife.

And now to poor, desolate Job enter the famous three friends: "Now when Job's three friends heard all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz, . . . and Bildad, . . . and Zophar, . . . and they made an appointment together to come to mourn with him, and to comfort him." No wonder they are called, "Job's comforters." "And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice and wept; . . . for they saw that his grief was very great."

"After this Job opened his mouth and cursed his day," but not his God.

It is impossible, within the limitations of one address, to take up and analyze the speeches of these four men, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Job. All that we may hope to do is to summarize--to describe the point of view of each toward the real problem of Job's sufferings. Perhaps even- so much would not be worth while, if it were not that these, especially the three friends, are representative men. They stand for three kinds of religious people, and for the attitude of those three kinds of people toward the real problems of human life.

And this is unspeakably serious, for Eliphaz, and Bildad, and Zophar, stand for the great mass of formal religionists, and they have nothing but words for this poor old world on the ash heap, and so the world never dreams of looking to the church for any real help.

Some characteristics these three men have in common. They are all dogmatists. Each is perfectly sure of his theory of the cause and cure of Job's sufferings. Each is so possessed by his theory that he has no real sympathy for Job. Like all mere dogmatists, their hearts are as hard as the nether millstone, and of

arctic coldness. And they all have a conventional God. Their God is a bundle of attributes, not a living, thinking, loving Being. Like all religious dogmatists they are cocksure about God. They know what He will do, and why. Furthermore, they are at one in the theory that Job is a hypocrite; that his fair outward life hides some secret sin for which he is under the terrible flail of God.

Their differences lie in the source of their authority as interpreters of the providences of God.

Eliphaz, then, stands for the religious dogmatist who has had a mysterious experience, and, therefore, what he says is true.

"Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up," etc. (iii:13-15)-

That is it! Dared Job, who had never had an "experience," contend against him? His theory was the authoritative one because he had had an "experience." We know thee well, O Eliphaz. Thy lineal descendants are with us still.

Bildad is a religious dogmatist of an even more intolerable type. He peddles religious platitudes; he is the prophet of the obvious; a passer on of easy cant. No wonder Job, an able and serious man, breaks out, "Who does not know these things?"

It is Bildad who comes to you when death has emptied your arms of one dearer to you than life, and tells you that God is good. But, somehow, Bildad is always held in much reputation for sanctity. "Isn't Bildad a good man?" they say. He says an undisputed thing in such an unctuous way that he carried all before him, while souls racked with anguish, cry out upon him for a babbling fool.

Zophar is yet another kind of dogmatist--perhaps the most hopeless of all. Zophar is a traditionalist. He appeals to the fathers. "Knowest thou not this of old?" All this, of course, is not to say that these men do not utter many truths. But over against all that they say stands Jehovah's sentence:

"The Lord said to Eliphaz, the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right." After that, it is useless to pick from the chaff of their words the few grains of the wheat of truth.

Now we have more difficulty with Elihu. I will say quite frankly, I have read and re-read his words. There is a wonderful unfolding of truth in a certain sense, in the thirty-third chapter, for example, about the finding of the ransom. He says a great many things which are true and paves the way for Jehovah to come upon the scene.

Then Jehovah takes up the case Himself, and it is a wonderful method. He brings Job into a consciousness of His power, and that always reaches the conscience. What was it that followed the miraculous draught of fishes "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." Divine power, and there is more than that; the folly of trying to solve the problems of life without God. When Jehovah is done He has a broken man before Him. God was after the death of self in that man; He was after getting Job to see himself. Those other men were occupied with what they believed Job's sinful actions. The twenty-ninth chapter is occupied with what Job was; a good man, but too conscious of it. In that chapter the personal pronouns "I" and "me" occur forty-five times, God is mentioned five times. He was a sincere man, but too well aware of it.

What does he say when Jehovah has revealed Himself to him? "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear." A real faith may be founded on testimony. Job had a testimony of God. He believed that testimony, and upon it was based a faith that stood all the shocks of suffering and loss. But now he has a vision of God Himself.

What is a vision in its essential meaning You will find in the Old Testament that no two visions are circumstanced alike, but the effect is always identical. It is an unseen thing made real. You believed it all the time; now it is knowing the thing. Job says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee." Did he mean that his mortal eye saw the uncreated One? Oh, no. He meant that God had become the actual One to him.

Now what happened to Job after the dealing had done its work, and he had seen and judged himself? His fruitfulness was doubled. Also he was made a priest to stand between God and his three friends, and they had to come to God through him. Double fruitfulness, and a higher form of service. And now we see the divine solution of the problem of the book. How shall I state that solution Let me use inspired words.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit."

"Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby."

The sufferings of the godly are not penal, but purifying, medicinal, healing.

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