

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JOB

The book of Job is one of the noblest poems in existence. The splendor of imagery which glows on every page; the personages introduced into it; the mysterious problems which it discusses; the action which sweeps through every emotion of the soul and strikes every chord of the human heart, invest the book with peculiar interest.

“The key word is “*Chastisement*,” the key verse, 34:31, 32.

It is anonymous. It has been ascribed to Job himself, to Elihu, to Solomon, Ezra, Moses and others. The question of its authorship can never be finally settled. There is something very attractive in the view that while Moses was sojourning in Midian he came in contact with those who told of Job’s great trial and of his happy deliverance, and that he wrote this majestic poem; but we cannot verify it. The anonymous character of the book, however, does not invalidate it. The authorship of Esther and of the Epistle to the Hebrews is unknown, yet their canonicity is not questioned.

I. JOB, HIS LIFE AND TIMES

1. *Is Job a real or fictitious character?*

The actual existence of the patriarch has been denied by many. Rabbi Maimonides, of the twelfth century, appears to have been the first to advance this notion. In current literature one meets with it almost constantly. We hold that the contents of this book are veritable history.

The extreme circumstantiality of the details; the description of Job, of his family and friends, with their names and special designations, his country, property, and many other points of the like nature, mark the history rather than fiction. Besides, the Bible itself settles this matter for all who receive it as God’s Word. The prophet Ezekiel associates him with Noah and Daniel, in a way to make his identity as real as those other servants of God, Ezekiel 14:14, 20. If Daniel and Noah were persons, then was Job also, James 5:11; “**Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.**”

That reference would be wholly without point, and an impeachment of the apostle's inspiration if Job were mythical.

2. The age in which Job lived.

Usher's chronology fixes it at B. C. 1520, twenty-nine years before the Exodus. But if the book were contemporary with the deliverance from Egypt, we might expect some reference to the events connected therewith, and more particularly in a debate in which human suffering, and God's providence are the theme. Silence here is inexplicable.

That Job lived in patriarchal times is very probable. He survived his sore trial one hundred and forty years, 42:16. He must have been of considerable age when the trial began, for he was the father of ten children, seven sons and three daughters, 1:2. He could be hardly less than fifty when the reverses came upon him; and his entire life must have been about two hundred years.

Men had ceased long before the time of Moses to live to this age.

- Terah lived two hundred and five years;
- Abraham, one hundred and seventy-five;
- Isaac, one hundred and eighty;
- Jacob, one hundred and forty-seven;
- Joseph, one hundred and ten;
- Moses, one hundred and twenty.

Job must have lived nearer to Abraham than to Moses; and this book was composed probably long before the first book of Moses; and so is no doubt the oldest record in the world. The sacrifice which Job offered for his children is patriarchal, combining with it the essential idea of the sin offering, and he acts as the priest, being the head of his family, as was the common practice of the patriarchs.

From the four constellations mentioned in 38:31, 32, three mathematicians have computed that Job's trial took place about B. C. 2100. There may be error, of course, in these calculations, as it is confessedly difficult to identify the constellations mentioned in the chapter; still, it is remarkable that three independent and scholarly investigators should arrive at about the same results, there being only forty-two years difference between them.

3. Structure of the book.

It consists of three parts:

Part I, Introductory narrative in prose, chapters 1, 2.

Part II. The poem, 3-42:6.

Part III, Concluding narrative in prose, 42:7-17.

It will be observed that the poem is very regular and simple in form. Its order is natural throughout. And yet it is replete with art the most subtle and attractive. With admirable skill and

wonderful force the problem is introduced, the frightful disproportion of happiness and misery in this world.

- The sad plight of Job,
- The dreadful losses he sustains,
- The horrible disease which consumes his flesh and racks his frame,
- The agonizing wail he at length pours forth,
- The dark questions that haunt his mind,
- The black doubts that assail his faith,
- The gulf of infidelity that yawns to receive him,

These in awful grandeur are set before the three philosophers with masterly hand. And the philosophers are utterly powerless to grapple with the problem. After three speeches each, save Zophar, who speaks but twice, they succumb and are silent.

Then follow the splendid monologues of Elihu, who, although he goes far toward answering the questions and solving the problem, leaves it still in doubt and darkness. But his addresses prepare the way for the appearing of the Lord on the scene, who speaks, sets Job right, and full blessing ensues.

4. *Design of the book.*

It is threefold.

- (1) To refute the slander of Satan.
- (2) To discuss the question of human suffering, and particularly the suffering of the righteous.
- (3) To reveal Job to himself, and remove the self-righteousness which prevented the full measure of blessing which God had in store for him.

5. *Job's happy estate, 1:1-5; 29.*

It is clear enough from these sections of the book that he was wealthy, influential, devout, benevolent, and highly esteemed—in short, a mighty Sheik in the land of Uz.

Touching his nationality little is known. There is no account of his ancestry, no mention of his parentage. We only know that he belonged to the great Shemitic family to which almost all God's revelations have been made. He comes before us in mature manhood, whence no one knows (even the location of Uz is conjectural): he disappears in the grave when his fitful life with its strange vicissitudes is over. This is characteristic. It is the problem God keeps before us—the mystery of Providence, the malice of Satan, the good enclosed in suffering. These he would have us see, not the man so much.

Job's prosperity for a time was uninterrupted. In his own striking imagery, "**I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil.**" His personal character is thus described: "**And that man was perfect and upright and one that feared God and eschewed evil,**" 1:1, 8. He was honest and straightforward and sincere in his guilelessness. No duplicity

either toward God or man was found in him. In his solicitude for his children and in his kindness and helpfulness to all about him, the genuineness of his piety was exhibited.

He was happy in his relationship with God, happy in his family, possessed of princely wealth, loved and trusted by his fellows—in short, the most powerful Sheik in the East. But in a day his joy fled, his prosperity blighted, his children cold in death, himself smitten with pain and anguish beyond the lot of men. What is the meaning of the dreadful reverses which befell him? This leads us to the contemplation of one of the main designs of the book.

6. *Satan's slander against Job*, 1:9-11; 2:4, 5.

The singular spectacle is presented of the Prince of Darkness appearing in the train of the Most High. But Satan is there for a definite purpose, viz., to accuse and malign, Revelation 12:10.

One question he starts, as full of subtlety as of malice: “**Doth Job serve for naught?**” ‘Is not the allegiance which receives such direct and tangible rewards only a refined form of selfishness? His fealty is mercenary, his attachment is for hire;’ “he serveth not God, but himself upon God.”

And Satan boldly asserts that if these external blessings were withdrawn, Job's allegiance would be cast off— “**he will curse thee to thy face.**”

One main feature of the problem which the book discusses is thus distinctly propounded:

- Can goodness exist irrespective of reward?
- Can the fear of God live when every inducement is withdrawn?
- Is allegiance to God based on the love and knowledge of Him, or does it exist only for the advantages it secures, the immunities it enjoys?

The problem is one of infinite moment; for if the love and grace of God only serve to produce a refined selfishness, then His whole work is abortive, and God is unable to retrieve the ruin of sin.

There was no method by which these slanderous accusations could be more effectively silenced than by the removal of those things on which the adversary asserted Job's fidelity depended. And so the servant of God was tested to the uttermost.

The trial was twofold.

First, his wealth and his children were suddenly snatched away from him. The book clearly teaches that it was through satanic agency, in the mysterious government of God, that these dreadful losses were sustained. But out of this furnace Job issues without the smell of fire on his garments, 1:21. 22; “**In all this, Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.**” In this assault Satan was forbidden to touch Job's person, 1:12.

He next affirms that Job will give up all for his life, 2:4. That this is also a lie, the devil knows perfectly well. Myriads of God's dear people have gone to the worst forms of death for the name and the love of Christ. Permission, however, is given, up to the point only this side of death, and

he is smitten with a loathsome disease—elephantiasis it is thought to have been, a disease believed by many in the East to be the judgment of God.

The patriarch sat down on the ash-heap in unspeakable desolation, anguish and woe, bereft of property, children, health; his wife advising him to renounce the God whom he had served so long. Will he finally break with God? Is there anything left to keep him faithful? Blessed be God for sustaining and conquering grace! Out of the final trial Job comes forth triumphantly: “**In all this did not Job sin with his lips,**” 2:10.

It is proved, therefore, once for all, and never more to be disputed, that Job’s loyalty is not grounded in selfishness, that true piety lives when all external advantages are withdrawn, and that God’s grace is more than a match for Satan’s malice and the deep-rooted egotism of sin.

Thus, one prime object of the book stands disclosed. But God had other and greater ends in the sufferings of his servant, which will appear in the sequel. It was not needful to send Job to such a terrible school of affliction merely to prove the Devil a liar. He was that from the beginning, John 8:44. There must be ulterior designs.

7. Let the reader note how prominent Satan is in the earlier chapters of the book.

We know that he was the real instigator of Job’s woes. Probably the patriarch himself did not; and so all the more inexplicable and mysterious his sufferings must have appeared to him and his friends, the comforters. Now, some things respecting this great Evil Spirit we gather from this inspired record.

(1) *His personality.* Satan is no myth. Every attribute, quality, action, mark, and sign which can indicate personality, are ascribed to him with a precision of language which refuses to be explained away. If we attempt to interpret this and the like Scripture as only meaning the principle of evil and not a person, then there is an end to all rules of fixed thought, and the Bible may mean anything and everything we please.

(2) *His power.* It is simply tremendous. He brought fire from heaven to consume the sheep [electricity]; the storm from the desert, which crushed the house where the young people were feasting: i. e., he can, when permitted, wield the forces of nature for the accomplishment of his wicked designs.

(3) *His enmity is even greater than his power.* He pursues his evil ends with tireless energy and sleepless vigilance.

(4) *Still, he is subordinate.* He can afflict only so far and when God for inscrutable purposes permits him. There was a “hedge” about Job through which Satan could not break. No doubt, like the lion he is, I Peter 5:8, he travelled round and round that hedge, but always on the outside. “He can go only the length of his chain.”

It is noteworthy that nearly all the revelation we have of this great evil spirit is found in the New Testament. Rarely is he mentioned in the Old—in Eden, in Job, David, Joshua the High Priest.

God delayed the full disclosure of him to later times, and then gave him twenty-eight names which fully describe him.

II. The other great features of the poem are now to be pointed out

These are two: The meaning of human suffering, particularly the suffering of the righteous; and the revelation of Job to himself. The first is the theme of the great Debate, chapters 4, 31. The second is traceable through the entire poem from chapter 3 to chapter 42, and is this: that the patriarch, with all his preeminent excellencies, secretly cherished and probably unwittingly cherished, somewhat of self-righteousness, a kind of religious pride which marred his lovely character and hindered the blessing God would bestow upon him; and this, cost what it might, must be cut up by the roots.

Many a citadel is proof against assault which yet may be obliged to succumb to the slow and steady progress of a siege. The first onset of pain is not so formidable as its protracted endurance. Job is now in this stage, the worst of all. Day after day he is compelled to drag his weary burden, how long we know not. Some time elapsed between the first wild outburst of trouble and the arrival of his friends.

The comforters were men of experience and wisdom, and profoundly religious. Piety and the fear of the Lord breathe throughout all their discourses. They cherished the kindest feelings toward their stricken friend, and had come expressly to minister to his wounded spirit, 2:11-13. Their visit, their sitting with him in silence for seven days with torn garments and dust on their heads, prove the sincerity of their sympathy. Nevertheless, their presence only served to exasperate him, and aggravate his misery.

1. *Job's first monologue, 3.*

It is unexampled for its expression of anguish and for its pathos. What language is there, and what imagery?

- He curses his birthday,
- He hurls anathemas upon his life;
- He asks that God may expunge that day from His calendar of time, that it may be frightened with horrible sounds, and chased forever by devouring death, that in eternity it may be a sunless day and a starless night.

A similar instance of the effect of accumulated sorrows is found in the life of Jeremiah, 20:14-18. It does not appear that the friends had uttered a word. Job opened the dialogue. They sat in total silence, covered with dust, gazing on a grief too profound for them to reach.

As we read these utterances, choked with passion and with tears, we feel that Job had very imperfectly learned to say, "*Thy will be done.*" He broke down in the very thing for which he was noted—patience. But let us remember Job did not know himself. He was complacently resting in his "integrity," which is another name for self-righteousness.

There was a root of bitterness in him of which he seems to have been ignorant, but which must be eradicated. He had to learn the lesson to which all the saints are set down, viz., that the egotism of nature is offensive to God; that there is no confidence to be put in the flesh.

And so, one aim of the book is to reveal Job to himself, and thus deliver him from the evil his afflictions were meant to remove. But let it be remembered that he curses his day, not his God, as Satan would have him do, He curses the day of his natural birth, not the day of his new birth. Amid all his doubts and darkness never for a moment does his faith in God waver—“**Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him,**” is his magnificent resolution.

2 *The debate.*

It consists of three rounds. Each of the three philosophers speaks three times, save Zophar, who speaks but twice, and Job replies to each in succession, chapters 4, 31.

(1) *The first round*, chapters 4, 14. The question is propounded by Eliphaz very skillfully and strongly, 4, 5: *God blesses the just, punishes the unjust.*

The proposition of Eliphaz is this: He that sins must suffer; as Job is a dreadful sufferer, he must be guilty of some grievous sin. Job replies, 6, 7, complaining that there is no adequate cause for his afflictions, that God treats him as if an irrational being, a sea or a sea-monster. His plaint resembles that of chapter 3, only more subdued and humble.

Bildad follows in the same strain of Eliphaz, 8. “**If thou wert pure and upright, surely now he would awake for thee;**” and since He does not, something must be frightfully wrong. Job stoutly resists the imputation, and appeals to God, who knows that he is not wicked, as charged, 9:10.

Zophar urges that he is certainly guilty, and exhorts him to repentance, 11. Job’s reply, 12-14, is remarkable. He shows how the wicked often prosper, how God does as He pleases with great and small, and appeals from them to God.

(2) *In the second round*, chapters 15-21, the comforters increase in the severity of their tone, and urge with considerable vehemence that it *is the wicked who are scourged, not the righteous*, and assail the integrity of Job, intimating broadly that he is guilty of some secret sin, some colossal crime.

Zophar, the most impetuous and severe of all, insinuates that there is hypocrisy in the case, that God has at length torn the mask from the false face and he now stands revealed in his true character, The patriarch refutes the reasoning, proves that the wicked often grow old and prosper, that apparently God treats the good and the bad alike in this life, and the dark doubts which the Psalmist felt (Psalm 73), haunt and harass his mind. With righteous indignation he flings from him the unworthy innuendos of the comforters and accuses them of intensifying his misery. After giving his wonderful confession of faith, 19:25-28, he points his argument with these telling words: “**But ye should say, Why persecute we him? seeing the root of the matter is in me. Be afraid of the sword.**”

(3) *In the third round*, chapters 22-26, the comforters are turned into headlong accusers.

Invective now takes the place of calm reasoning; and Job instead of getting better grows worse, and even yearns to appear before the throne of God, declaring that if he could do so he would order his cause before him, and fill his mouth with arguments, 23:3, 4. "Job's disputing with God is as terrible as it is pitiable. It is terrible, because he uplifts himself, Titan-like, against God; and pitiable, because the God against whom he fights, is not the God he has known, but a phantom which his temptation has presented to his dim vision."

3. *The cause of the failure of the disputants.*

The mistake of the comforters was this: they insisted that God was dealing with Job retributively.

- They labored to convict him of high-handed wickedness.
- They hint again and again that if all were told nothing would be too bad to impute to him.

"Who ever perished being innocent, and when were the righteous cut off?" is the foundation of their reasoning. They totally failed to discover the true cause for his suffering.

They applied many principles of the moral government of God to the wrong case; and hence their argument only served to exasperate him. No wonder he reproached them for their cruelty, and in the bitterness of an insulted character and wounded spirit, covered them with scorn and contempt. Nor was Job less wrong. He insisted that God acted arbitrarily; that having the power to do as He pleased with him, He did so. Because he was not guilty of any crime, of notorious sin, as the philosophers sought to make out, he infers that his affliction is without adequate grounds, that it is altogether disproportionate to his case, and therefore unjust and arbitrary.

4. *Job's second monologue*, chapters 27-31.

It was now Zophar's turn to speak, but he is silent, and the others also hold their peace, virtually admitting defeat.

The great debate has ended without concluding anything. The mystery of the affliction of the godly remains unexplained. This second monologue is in many ways very remarkable. Its diction and imagery, its deep insight into man's powers and discoveries, its earnest piety coupled with its recognition of God's unfathomableness, its inimitable pathos, and its passionate appeals are unsurpassed in the whole field of literature.

- The touching description of his misery as contrasted with his former happiness,
- The gloom that has settled down upon him,
- The exposure to shame and ignominy,
- The inward terrors, and unanswered prayers—

How graphically it is all portrayed. And yet never once does he abate his claim to innocency. He clings as tenaciously as ever to his integrity.

That he has been wrong he will not allow. He is a spotless person, according to his own account of himself, chapter 29. In chapter 31:35, 3 he expresses the desire that the Almighty would answer him, draw up charges against him (such is the meaning of “**adversary writing a book**”); he would make answer.

What language for a sinful mortal to use toward the infinite God!

This is the secret of the book and the key to Job’s trial. Let us not read it as if the aim were merely to prove the devil a liar, or to discuss the mysterious government of the world, or to vindicate God’s wisdom and goodness, or to demonstrate Job’s sincerity. All this is in it; but all this is not the main design. As God’s dealing with him was personal, some personal reason or cause there must have been in the patriarch for it.

A survey of his monologues and replies to his friends reveals the very important fact that he had not in any measure learned that in him, that is, in his flesh, there dwelt no good thing; that before God he had absolutely nothing to recommend him to the divine favor. And this truth is forcibly brought out by the addresses of Elihu.

5. *Elihu’s ministry*, chapters 32-37.

Who he was or where his home was is not definitely known. His name means “*God is he*,” or “*He is my God*;” his father’s name, Barachel, “*God blesses*.” Obviously the knowledge and fear of the Lord found a place in his family. He was present during the debate, but being a young man he modestly remained silent while his elders struggled with the deep question of God’s providence and human suffering.

In two terse sentences the whole preceding discussion is condensed: “**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,**” 32:2, 3.

There it is in a nut-shell. If the friends cannot answer him, why should they condemn him? Moreover, Job’s justification of himself is virtually God’s condemnation. God’s chastising hand was upon him in sore affliction, in order that the evil in him might be disclosed, judged, and put away and his self-vindication really meant the defeat of His gracious purpose, so far as he could defeat it. For to justify himself was to take his stand on the ground of law or his own righteousness; and there condemnation must be his portion.

Elihu pours a flood of light on the subject of afflictions.

He shows why these are sent on the godly, and what they accomplish, 33:17, 30; 34:31, 32. In visiting suffering on His people God is not occupied with the penal side of their sins. Their afflictions are not judgments, but chastisements. The object of them is to keep back the soul of the saint from the pit, and to hide pride from him. Hence sufferings, instead of being an expression of His wrath, flow from divine tenderness and love.

The doctrine of Elihu is as distant as the poles from that of Eliphaz and his companions. Job recognizes the truth of it, for it is self-evidencing, and is silent. Besides, he shows Job what false notions he entertained about himself. **“I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me,”** 33:9; cf. 9:21; 12:4; 16:17.

What language for a sinner to use with whom God was having some sort of controversy, and upon whom such awful sorrows had come! And yet Job adds: **“Behold, he findeth occasions against me, He counteth me for his enemy,”** 33:10. Now here is a palpable discrepancy. Could a holy and just God find fault with a pure and innocent man? Impossible. Either Job is self-deceived, or God is unrighteous. Elihu brings this out; then pronounces sentence: **“Behold, in this thou art not just; I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.”**

What a simple truth; and yet how appropriate to the case in hand. If God be greater than man, clearly he and not man must be the judge of what is right.

6. *The Lord's presence*, chapters 38-42.

All Job's misconceptions of the divine character and government, all his rash criticisms on the Lord's ways, and all his fancied goodness vanish instantly before that majestic Presence.

“Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me which I knew not. 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,” 42:3, 5, 6.

What a thorough breakdown. Once Job wanted to be in His presence that he might debate the question of his suffering with Him. Now he is there, and this is the issue: profoundest humiliation and repentance. All egotism is gone, and pride is in the dust. The final end and aim of his sorrows are at length attained, and full blessing ensues.

7. *And now as a fitting close to the poem.*

Job becomes an intercessor for the three philosophers who had not spoken the right thing as the patriarch had done, 42:8, 9. The friends also who appear to have stood aloof from him in the day of his calamity now gather about him with their gifts; and the Lord Himself doubles for His servant all that he had lost, save His children. And yet these are doubled likewise. Ten waited him on the other side, and ten were given here. Thus, the oldest book in the world teaches the doctrine of immortality.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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