

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century
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LESSON SEVENTEEN

JOB

All questions concerning the historicity and antiquity of the book of Job, will have to be passed over in our present work for the want of space, but the reader may be referred for them to the author's *Primers of the Faith*.

While some ascribe the authorship to Job himself, and some to Elihu, others, and their number is large, think it was written by Moses. But the question is indeterminable. The book is poetical in literary form, with the exception of what might be called the prologue, chapters 1 and 2, and the epilogue, 42:7-17, which are prose.

The theme of the book seems to be the meaning and object of evil and suffering under the government of a holy, wise and merciful GOD, and may be outlined thus:

The prologue Chapters 1, 2
The dialogue Chapters 3-31
The words of Elihu Chapters 32-37
The words of the Almighty Chapters 38-41
The response of Job 42:1-6
The epilogue 42:7-17

The Key to the Book

The key to the book is found, I think, in the first chapter, which, after an introductory testimony to the character of Job, translates the reader to heavenly scenes (v. 6).

The "sons of God" referred to in this verse are angelic beings who are represented as bringing in their reports to GOD, the mystery being that Satan is found "**also among them.**" How, or in what sense, or on what ground, the prince of darkness is thus granted access to GOD is a question these lessons cannot take the space to discuss; but we accept the fact and draw certain inferences therefrom. He is seen here in his scriptural attitude of the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10); and when GOD taunts him, if one may so say, with the uprightness of Job whom he has been unable to corrupt, he at once charges him with a mercenary spirit, and declares that if GOD were to take his temporal blessings away from him he would be as bad as the rest.

GOD accepts the implied challenge in these words, and puts His servant into the hands of Satan for a limited period, and the exercise of a terrible but limited power on Satan's part, that it may be seen if the charge be true. In other words, it is not Job so much who is on trial here, as GOD. It is not a question of Job's loyalty so much as it is one of GOD's power. Is the grace of GOD able to keep one of His servants loyal and faithful to Him, even though he be stripped of everything which men count dear in this earth? The outcome was victory for GOD and discomfiture for Satan under circumstances calculated to prove a great comfort and blessing to GOD's people in every generation.

It is this thought that is suggested to me by the prologue, and which, kept in mind, lightens up the meaning of the whole book.

The Discussion

The dialogue proceeds on the determination of the question as to whether great suffering such as Job's be not an evidence of great sin on his part, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar affirming, and Job denying.

The dispute is carried on in a series of three acts, each act containing three arguments of the "friends," and as many defenses by Job, until the last, when Zophar is silenced and Job triumphs.

Job's defense would seem to be based on two grounds:

- (1) the admitted prosperity of the wicked (chap. 21), and
- (2) his own personal righteousness (chaps. 29-31).

It would seem at first that his friends sincerely intended to comfort him, but were finally driven to accusation by the caustic character of his replies, caused in part, no doubt, by his intense suffering. Whether his friends were sincere or insincere at the beginning of the dialogue must be determined by the view taken of chapter 4. It can be so read as to suggest either view.

The words of Elihu also suggest a series of three acts, out of which we gather that he rebuked both parties to the debate (32:1-3), the friends for their accusations which were unwarranted in

great measure, and Job for his self-righteousness, equally unwarranted.

His philosophy of the sufferings differs from that of the others in that he believes they were sent for the good of the sufferer (33:28-30).

- the first part of his speech is addressed to Job (chaps. 32, 33),
- the second to the three friends (chap. 34 l. and
- the last again to Job (chaps. 35-37).

As he closes he perceives a thunderstorm gathering, whose description forms a grand and fitting climax to his address, and out of which the voice of the Almighty is now heard.

The discussion thus far had been one-sided, confined to the mystery of evil, and the balance is now restored by considering the mystery of good which the Almighty reveals. It is notable that He gives no explanation of Job's suffering. renders no decision on the subject in debate, and offers no hint of compensation to His servant for what he has endured.

The pervading idea of His wonderful revelation is that of power, absolute sovereign, as though His design were to overwhelm Job and effect his unconditional surrender.

The crisis in Job's life was something like that of Moses as he stood in the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33, 34), or Elijah at Horeb (I Kings 19), or Paul on his way to Damascus (Acts 9), and the result in Job's case is not unlike that in their cases.

Sober meditation on the book leads to the inevitable conclusion that such experiences as those of Job (and they come in kind, only in a lesser degree, to about every true child of GOD), may be for discipline indeed, and to teach the lesson of submission so vital to be learned, but also to serve a divine purpose far exceeding human knowledge, in the superhuman world. Compare such passages as John 9:3; I Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; and I Peter 1:12.

What a dignity such a thought adds to the suffering for righteousness' sake!

~ end of Lesson 17 ~
