

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BOOK OF JOB

WHY DO THE GODLY SUFFER? The fact is, God does not explain everything to us. *He giveth not account of any of his matters* (33:13). The point of the Book of Job is not to explain why we suffer, but to show that humble, trustful submission to God in affliction is the way of wisdom. He does not owe us an explanation. He knows what is best for us. There is much we simply do not understand.

God is teaching His attributes to the angelic beings by means of His dealings with His redeemed (see Ephesians 3:10). Any affliction we face may involve behind-the-scenes events like those of chapters 1 and 2.

God is in control of “second causes,” including Satan. God is the One who brought up Job in the first place as a target for Satan (1:8; 2:3), but God limits what Satan can do to Job (1:12; 2:6). God holds Satan personally responsible for his sinful schemes and actions. Thus, in terms of corrupt schemes, Satan brought the evil on Job (2:7). But in terms of absolute sovereignty, God brought the evil on Job (1:21; 2:10; 42:11).

Satan does not understand why anyone would serve God. He thinks we are in it only for ourselves (1:9-12; 2:4-5). How void of all good he is!

Satan wants believers to think that God is their enemy. Satan’s goal was for Job to curse God to His face (1:11; 2:5). But Job continued to worship God (1:20). At one point, Job cursed the day of his birth and the night of his conception, but he did not curse God (ch. 3). At this point, Job would have been better off to remain silent. No longer could it be said that he did not sin with his lips. At least he did maintain communication with God, as is evidenced in his discourses. Job did not grow silent toward God, even though God was for a season silent to him.

According to W.R. Downing, “Job is the greatest study on clinical depression found in Scripture.” Job overcame by faith in the character and promises of God without medications or psychotherapy.

Satan’s methods against Job are as follows:

- Loss of all outward prosperity, possessions and family. Satan spared Job’s wife, no doubt because “she was a greater trial to Job alive than dead” (Downing).
- Loss of physical health.
- False accusations by friends who are confident that they are speaking for God, but are incompetent to deal with the issues at hand. This seems to have been more difficult for Job than all the previous calamities. There is no greater trial for a believer than to be misunderstood and cruelly treated by friends. Certainly our Lord Jesus Christ is able to sympathize with those who suffer thusly.

The best of saints still have indwelling sin. All that is necessary for dross to appear in any saint is for God to turn up the heat. It took an extraordinary measure of heat in Job’s case because he was such a godly man.

Concerning the discourses that constitute the greater part of the book, Calvin wisely says that Job has a good case, but argues it poorly; and the three friends have a poor case, but argue it well.

The friends insist that Job is under God’s judgment because of some unidentified sin. But Job’s conscience is clear. He is ready to acknowledge that he is a sinner before God, as all men are; but he has been upright in his dealings with his fellow man. Job is left to think that there is no reason

for his calamities. It is true that there was no reason in Job, as 2:3 makes clear; but God certainly had His reasons for the whole series of events.

Job faced a dilemma in his own mind. He must either give up his integrity, by confessing to what he did not do, or accuse God of injustice toward him. Job refuses either option, but after prolonged provocation from the three friends, Job went too far in defending himself. (Who among us would not do the same in those circumstances?) He was not guilty of what the friends accused him, but he was guilty of justifying himself at God's expense. Job would later regret what he said in passages like chapter 3; 10:2-3; 13:19-24; 19:11; 27:2, 6; 30:21; 31:35-37. Sometimes silence is best (cp. James 1:19; 3:2). We must not be preoccupied with our own reputation! Leave it to God to vindicate you.

In the contest of "Who knows God best?" the danger on all sides is that of pride. *Knowledge puffeth up* (1Cor. 8:1). Intelligent Christian, beware!

It is true that the godly prosper **eternally**. But they do not always prosper **temporally**. The prosperity gospel, set forth by the three friends, is inadequate to explain the earthly suffering of the godly. The prosperity gospel is a cruel taskmaster in the hands of those not currently suffering.

Job faced the conflict that every believer faces, that of faith versus sense. In his discourses, he fluctuates between faith and doubt. He admits, *I am full of confusion* (10:15). Nevertheless he scales the heights in 19:25-27, where he expresses hope in the final resurrection. Here is the essence of the fight of faith: seeing the invisible. With no place to turn, Job must trust the hand that smites him. There is no other option for the believer—and no safer place to be!

When God's providence seems to disagree with His promises, keep trusting the promises! God's hand does not always reveal His heart.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of the book is to understand the part that Elihu plays. With Elihu, the focus shifts from the cause of the calamities to Job's hasty words after the calamities in his discourses. Job's silence upon hearing Elihu does not indicate that Elihu added nothing to the discussion, but rather it indicates that Elihu's perspective was distinct from that of the three friends. They could only defend God by accusing Job: "Affliction is a judgment." Job could only defend God by saying, "God afflicts both the righteous and the wicked" (9:22). But Elihu defends God by saying, "Affliction is for your good, Job. He is teaching you. *Trust thou in him*" (36:22; 35:14).

Concerning Elihu's discourses, Matthew Henry observes, "All this Job not only bore patiently, but took kindly, because he saw that Elihu meant well; and whereas his other friends had accused him of that from which his own conscience acquitted him, Elihu charged him with that only for which, it is probable, his own heart, now upon the reflection, began to smite him." William Henry Green says, "In the mouth of Elihu it is different. It contains no covert censure of himself...no insinuations...distortions or false conclusions." Elihu simply vindicates the righteousness of God, showing where Job had insisted too strongly on his innocence. The accusation of the three friends, that Job's sin had brought his calamities, was wrong. But the accusation of Elihu, that Job had gone too far in defending himself, was true.

In 38:2-3, God said to Job, *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.* Though some think God aimed this rebuke at Elihu, Job took it as directed to himself, as 42:1-6 makes clear.

God in His answer to Job does not avoid the subject at hand. He confronts it from a surprising angle—that of creation. His power, wisdom and goodness are evident in all creation; therefore Job must not question God in his own case. Job's response proves that God did address the vital

issues, saying the very things that Job needed to hear. He is humbled for having doubted the goodness of God in the exercise of His sovereignty.

Creation is a school for our instruction. God's "science exam" was for Job's benefit, to humble him—and that is the effect it had. But **how** did it humble him? It was not simply by overpowering and overwhelming him. Instead, it was by demonstrating God's goodness in all creation. Job had questioned the goodness of God. But creation offers abundant proof of His goodness.

God's message to Job was not merely, "I am Almighty. You have no choice but to submit. No further knowledge is attainable to you on this earth. So sit down and shut up!" No, **there is resolution here for Job**. God's glorious attributes of power, wisdom and goodness shine throughout these creation discourses. By this means, Job comes to see more of God's full character, as he declares in 42:5, *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.*

There is truly a smiling face hidden behind the frowning providence! He is a God of purpose, and His purpose is a gracious one! "God is equally loving and gracious when he sends affliction and when he sends prosperous abundance...It is good if God does it; it is the best thing possible" (Green).

When Job gets his long-desired opportunity to speak with God, he is far from bold. He is humble, repentant, and sees himself as vile (40:3-5). Not just the sin of his lips, but all that he is before God, is cause for his mouth being stopped. Humble, adoring silence is all he can bring before God. (Cp. Habakkuk 2:20.)

Why does God say so much to correct Job and yet says very little in way of reproof to the three friends? (He speaks four chapters to Job, and one verse to Eliphaz.) Perhaps it is because He is going to use Job as an example to them of true, humble repentance that they must follow.

Job's circumstances improve only after he prays for his three friends (42:10). What gracious, Christ-like intercession! "Never was priest arrayed in such glory as Job on the dunghill praying for his friends" (Joseph Caryl).

The Job who emerges at the end is a more humble, holy Job. Thus, God more than foiled Satan's purpose. In the end, God is glorified, Satan is defeated, and Job is sanctified. Job was a good man who was made even better by means of his adversities. Satan meant it for evil, but God meant it for good (cp. Gen. 50:20). O the wisdom of God!

We do not read that God disclosed to Job the challenge involving Satan in chapters 1 and 2. Why? Because Job did not need to know about that challenge in order to profit from these events in his own life. God has reasons for all He does, but He does not have to reveal those reasons to us. We must learn to trust Him without any reservation in all things.

On the whole, let us learn from Job to submit to God in every circumstance, and that joyfully! We can trust Him in all He does, even though we cannot comprehend all His purposes. The grace that sustained Job will sustain us too. *Ye have heard of the patience [i.e. endurance] of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy* (James 5:11).

– Daniel Chamberlin

[I highly recommend *Conflict and Triumph, The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, by William Henry Green (reprint, Banner of Truth, 1999). James Durham's *Lectures on Job* (reprint, Naphtali Press, 1995), which is more expositional than Green's work, is also very helpful.]