

MSB236

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*BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM*

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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# JOB AND THE SILENCE OF GOD

By M. B. Hammond

The book of Job is most mysterious in its origin. The time period it occupies is unknown, but from references to the patriarchal system and the lack of any reference to the law of Israel, it approximates the time of Abraham within a few hundred years. The author is also unknown, though some theologians guess it was written by Moses, estimating the location the land of Uz to be near to the land of Midian, where Moses spent 40 years as a shepherd. Job is almost entirely Hebrew poetry, except for the first two and last chapters. It belongs in the Bible, because of references to it in Scripture.

The first reference, dealing with the Lord's wrath on Israel says, **Though Noah, Daniel and Job, were in it (Israel), as I live saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter, they shall deliver but their own souls by their own righteousness** (Ezekiel 14:14,20). The Lord was explaining that every Israelite would be held responsible for his own sins. The second reference says, **Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience (endurance) of Job, and have seen the end (Gk. -telos, consummation) of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful (full of pity), and of tender mercy** (James 5:11). The "patience" of Job is thus the ability of a believer to endure any testing that might come to him or her.

Job was a righteous man, probably a king, ruler or a nobleman in his land. He enjoyed contact with God and, while not a Jew, he had received instruction in righteousness (chap. 31) through training by God. In the first chapter, Job is called "the greatest of all the men of the East." When the day came that the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord (Jehovah), Satan came among them. After inquiring where he came from, the Lord addressed Satan saying . . .

**.. hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright (righteous) man, one that feareth God and escheweth (turneth away from) evil? (Job 1:8). Satan's response challenged God, saying . . . Doth Job fear God for naught? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all 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 curse Thee to Thy face (1:9-11). The Lord responded: . . . behold, all that he hath is in thy power: only upon himself put not forth thine hand . . . (1:12). So Satan destroyed all that he owned, including his family. When Job learned this 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 (highly exalted) be the name of the Lord." In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly (1:21-22).**

Again, in chapter two, the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came with them. The Lord inquired where Satan had been, and again reiterates what was said in 1:8: . . . **'Hast thou considered My servant Job, . . . one that feareth God and escheweth evil? and still he 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. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse Thee to Thy face'** (2:3-5). Thus, Job was afflicted with boils all over his body from his head to his foot, suffering great pain, and his wife said to Him, . . . **'Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die.'** But he said unto her, **'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?'** In all this did not Job sin with his lips. Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; **Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort (solidly encourage) him** (2:9-11).

They hardly knew him when they saw him. They tore their cloaks and sprinkled dust upon their heads and sat with him for seven days, not speaking a word, because they saw his grief was very great.

The major part of the next 30 chapters is concerned with the accusations of his three friends and Job's defense of his righteousness in opposition to them. A student of theology would describe their accusations as having some truth, but they were largely the Satanic and false teachings known as "retribution/recompense theology." This means that Job was clearly assumed to be guilty of some great secret sin in his life to account for all the evil that had been done to him. Ancient Israelites and other peoples of the East viewed suffering this way. It is not surprising that Job could not convince them of his innocence, even though Satan's accusation, presuming he only wanted the rewards of righteousness, was unfounded. God maintained His silence throughout these passages and through the address of a fourth figure, called Elihu, who spoke in defense of God (chaps. 33-37). God's silence is not unlike today (and the last 1900-plus years). Job was agitated in his pain, and responded several times in righteous indignation to their assumption of his guilt or sinfulness in the sight of God. Each one of them elaborated the claim three times that what had happened to Job could only be God's judgment of Job's wickedness, which could not be explained in any other way. However, Job maintained his innocence and insisted on his righteousness, not understanding why God was punishing him so unfairly.

Job's ignorant criticism of God was unfair, and the student would ask, "Is God going to be held to a strict set of regulations based on human interpretations of His relationship with mankind?" Unless we recognize that God's dispensations are His method of working with men, we cannot appreciate that what happened to Job was due to God working in grace during the Day of man. In His grace He gave permission to Satan, who is the prime mover behind sin, evil and suffering, to test Job, and maintained His silence. Likewise, it is clear that Satan's only interest in mankind is a method of getting back at God by having them curse Him. Job would not do this, though he understood that the retribution/recompense theology has many inconsistencies in it. Satan has been successful in blaspheming God, by getting most men to use the term "act of God" for most horrible things that happen to men, including the resulting pain and suffering these cause.

So, it is with us, living in the Dispensation of the Grace of God. God appears to be silent, taking no overt interest in His creation. But, like Job, we have a wealth of knowledge about God and His purposes given us in the Bible. This includes His law (words), commandments, precepts, testimonies, statutes and judgments. The Bible gives us all we need to know about our God, and in His completed Word, He makes clear what He desires of men,

with John 3: 16 presenting His entire gospel in a nutshell. However, Satan has confused men's minds with a multitude of Christian religions, and their frequent disputation about God's Word. Greater confusion among other non-Christian religions shows that Satan has succeeded in keeping the knowledge of God away from mankind, as he used Job's so-called friends to inflict greater pain on Job by uttering their accusations against Job's righteousness. God's silence caused Job much doubt and anguish, but he never strayed from his faith. Because of his great pain, he called on God to end his life or show him what he did wrong (assuming the retribution/recompense theology might be right). After all, this concept underlies the Kingdom or government of God until its later days, when He begins to withdraw His restraints.

Job confirmed his faith in God in saying, **Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him: but I will maintain mine own ways** (his innocence) **before Him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite** (godless man) **shall not come before Him** (Job 13:15-16). He also said, **0 that Thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that Thou wouldest keep me secret, until Thy wrath be past, that Thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me. If a man die, shall he live *again*? all the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thy hands** (Job 14: 13-15). The constant accusations caused him to say, **Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven** (engraved) **with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever! For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* He shall stand at the latter day** (*Heb.-acaryth yom*, concluding days) **upon the earth. And *though* after my skin worms destroy this *body*, yet in my flesh shall I see God** (19:23-26). Thus, Job's faith was not shaken. He knew his righteousness was known to God and would be his salvation. Several times he responded with satire to his friends, whose accusations without proof were continually turned on him, explaining how he would like their comfort and quiet, rather than all this pointed assumption of his guilt.

The theology student would call the book of Job a prime example of Hebrew wisdom literature that deals with the concept of "theodicy,," which means a vindication of divine justice in allowing the existence of evil. The true Bible student knows Satan is behind most human misery, but Job's record is about human suffering as a test. While God does inflict suffering for reasons of judgment, discipline, refining and testing, Elihu, the fourth

speaker, defended God, saying God was not unjust (34:10-12, 21-28), God was neither uncaring (35:15), nor was He powerless to act for His people (chaps. 36 and 37). He insisted that a relationship with God was not founded on, nor maintained by man's insistence on loyalty, purity, or righteousness, but based wholly on God's grace. He prepared Job for God's response to the debates and Job's ultimate submission to God's sovereignty. Speaking out of the windstorm, God began by charging Job with darkening His counsel by "words without knowledge." God did not address Job's suffering, nor his attacks on God's justice. God posed many unanswerable problems, proving He alone had created everything, demonstrating His sovereignty and omnipotence. God said to Job, "**Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it**" (40:2). Clearly, Job could not respond to God's remarks (40:3-5). God stressed His power in the "ode to the behemoth and the leviathan" (chaps. 40 and 41). Since man has no power over these creatures, he can find strength and power only in God, who is ruler; omnipotent, just, loving and perfectly righteous.

The conclusions are that God is not limited by men's preconceptions of justice, and sin is not the only basis for suffering. Accepting such false tenets causes them to blame God, and retribution/recompense theory distorts God's grace. Satan is behind such false ideas, and he is always unfair and unjust. God's silence (unseen purposes) may bring tribulation to some men, but a strong faith produces perseverance, strong character and hope; these all make a man strong in the love of God (Rom. 5:3-5).

**END**

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