

The Clouds we Dread
(Or The Sufferings of Job)

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Bibliography

All quotations are taken from the Authorised Version of the Bible.
The hymn 'When peace like a river attended my soul' is taken from the Baptist Church Hymnal.

This book is dedicated to the two women I most admire, my mother and her mother; of whom it can be said, as of Job,

'I have refined thee . I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake.' Isaiah 48:10,11 and also
'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.' Ephesians 3:10,11

PREFACE

The book of Job has a very special message for the people of God in these days; latter days as they are called.
Across the world, in almost every land, there are those of God's elect going through a furnace of great trials. There are mockings and scourgings of all kinds, men and

women are committed to prison and with quivering hearts we watch, some of us from afar, whole parts of the body of Christ passing through the fire. Some being translated, as it were, by a very chariot of fire.

We are one, sharing one life with the Head and with the members. And it is written 'whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it.' Cor.12:26

In a spiritual sense we are part of them but as they walk in integrity of heart and obedience to His known will these martyrs of the church must be very perplexed and dismayed. Yet, 'apart from us they should not be made perfect.' Heb.11:40

This is not an exegesis of the text of Job but it is written rather from an experimental point of view that the Holy Spirit might apply it to the needs of the children of God in these days when true gold is being severely tested.

Job suffered. Just like us. He also had an enemy, the devil, just like us. But he had friends, almost the same as ours. And a great God, just the same as ours.

Job's story is concerned with his suffering and the reaction of everyone around him. It could be called 'How to suffer and like it.'

Job had friends, an enemy and a God. This is his story.

1. Job, Heaven and The adversary

Job was a man greatly loved, partly because his own love had not been hoarded. He had had a long, happy life before his devastating illness. Then God brought it all to an end for awhile and he had a long, happy life after it was over.

Job's story, and sometimes ours too, is the few crushing months between.

Perhaps God will teach us the same lessons.

Let's hope so, because the deeper lessons on suffering are entrusted to us through this story. Job was no mythical character. The early Christians knew the reality of his history and regarded him as an example of patience, and actually, his whole life story as an encouragement to trust in the compassion and love of God more fully.

The Jews tenaciously kept their book of Job in the Canon of scripture. It is said to be the oldest book extant and to have been written some two thousand years before Christ. It is impossible to be certain but some scholars assign the book to the time of Abraham

Job was the greatest of all the children of the East, we are told. He was of princely rank; he may even have been a king; he was certainly cultured and learned to an advanced degree.

There is a familiarity in his book with all kinds of science and general knowledge on a number of subjects. He was a man of great wealth; his possessions consisted of many hundred yoke of oxen, thousands of sheep and camels and a very great household.

The book of Job was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul quotes it in 1 Corinthians by saying, from Job chapter five, verse thirteen,

‘It is written, He takes the wise in their own craftiness.’

Jesus also refers to Job from Job 38:30, when he says,

‘For where the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.’ (1)

Nothing in scripture is written to satisfy the curiosity. Histories and lives are described only so far as to fulfil the main purpose of God in winning men back to Himself. It is certainly so with Job. A very few words tell of his position, wealth and family circle. We are brought immediately to the following brief but immensely important character sketch:

‘The man was perfect and upright, and one
That feared God, and eschewed evil.’ (1:1)

We need to fully recognise Job’s spiritual character at the time when he was going through this extreme trial. He is described as perfect and upright and God uses the same language when He talks of him in the council of heaven.

He was wholehearted and sincere in his loyalty to God. He was not of a double mind, seeking to serve two masters, God and himself.

This is what made him upright before men. The fear of God carries with it a sense of quick understanding and sensitiveness to His will. It was an intuitive knowledge of the mind of God which came from a close fellowship. Job, therefore, also had a dread of grieving God and an equal horror of sin. Also he had an advanced instinctive consciousness of the need of sacrifice with the shedding of blood for the remission of sins, even those of ignorance. He anticipated, in this, the law given to Israel.

In his fear of sinning against God, he rises early to offer sacrifices on behalf of his children in case they had gone beyond the limits of restraint or had thoughts of evil in their minds. His fear of God was not spasmodic but his offerings, we are told, were continual.

It was a deeply rooted principle of his life so we know that it was not only when he was under some great pressure.

Further features of Job’s godly character are apparent more fully through the story but the Holy Spirit emphasises the secret of his life right at the beginning of the history of his sufferings. He had done nothing to cause trouble. Job’s fear of God and walk of integrity must be clearly recognised if we are to understand the meaning of his trial and our own as well.

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We start with the scene we are allowed to glimpse into heaven.

We are being shown Jehovah seated upon His throne in the centre of His council of holy ones. The veil is drawn aside and it is an audience day in the court of the

King of Kings. The 'sons of God' or angels, present themselves before the Lord to report upon their various duties.

Satan, the adversary, enters among them in his capacity as prince of this world and the prince of the power of the air. Revelation speaks of him as 'the great dragon . . . That old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world (or the whole inhabited earth) . . . The accuser of the brethren.' 12:9,10

There are other passages in the bible that confirm, almost in detail, this description of the Lord of Hosts in council.

David speaks of the Commander of the heavenly armies in Psalm 89:7,8 who was greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints.

Daniel also sees and hears the holy ones, speaking one to the other of the purposes of God on the earth, and the sentence upon Nebuchadnezzar was apparently decreed by the whole council of God assembled and a 'holy one' entrusted with its fulfilment. (2)

Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest standing before the Lord, and tells how those that stood by were bidden to remove the filthy garments and clothe him with a change of raiment. (3)

In the book of Revelation we are shown Michael leading forth the hosts of the Lord against the hosts of darkness in that great and terrible war in heaven. The rebel prince of the power of the air is finally cast out of the heavenly places and cast down to earth and all his angels with him. (4)

So this entry in Job is not the only place to see the character of Satan and his activity but it is one of the most vivid.

To the question of the Lord to Satan, 'From where do you come?' Satan not only answers by speaking of his occupation but also imparts a description of himself. He is going to and fro in the earth and walking up and down in it. The original idea is that this is done in the heat of haste. He has been hurrying through the earth as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; or as an unclean spirit seeking rest and finding none. We could pay special attention for a minute to this characteristic of restless energy causing tumult and unrest wherever he goes. It can be contrasted vividly with the calm walk of our saviour who came to give rest and peace to all he met.

No feverish heat of haste ever comes from God, and just so far as we will become partakers of the Divine nature, will we also show the calm restful power so strikingly manifested in the man Christ Jesus.

The book of Jude is very clear on this characteristic of Satan. He is, he says, uncentred from his place in the order of God, a wandering star, aimless and tempting others, bringing them into the same plight as himself. (5)

The Lord knew well what the adversary's feverish hurry to and fro in the earth meant. It bode no good to anyone much less the servants of God. 'Have you considered - or set your heart on - my servant Job', asks Jehovah in chapter one, verse eight, 'that there is none like him in all the earth?' Before the whole council in heaven there is a testimony to Job's worth given here. He is a blameless man; true, godly, abstaining from everything evil. There is none like him. That is, there was none, among all those who sought to serve God, as choice and as mature, so open a character and reliable. So apparently he is actually chosen as the one most fitting to be entrusted with this pattern of God's ways for all His children in any kind of furnace of trial, affliction or suffering!

Paul the apostle understood this privilege of being chosen of God as an object lesson to others;

'I obtained mercy,' he writes, 'that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern.' (8)

This was to be God actually showing His compassion and mercy in placing His loved one in the crucible, that his affliction, which is only for a moment, might work for him (and us) an 'exceeding weight of glory.' In answer to God's question, Satan had considered Job. There is no doubt about that when we listen to his answer. True to his character, he sneeringly casts doubt on the integrity Job's motives. He suggests that Job fears God for all that he gets from Him and not purely for His glory. Job, of all men, could not live or die unto himself. Directly resulting from this characteristic of his, that there was none like him in all the earth, he became as it were, a city set on a hill that could not be hid. His fall would be a casting down of many. The prince of darkness knew this, and Job was, therefore, a target.

It is always whispered in dark places that all our service is for selfish motives. It is beyond the understanding of those in the devil's power that love and obedience to God can be disinterested.

Satan goes on to say that his insinuation is borne out by the fact that God had put a hedge about Job. Praise God! Satan seeks to attack us and finds a hedge about us. The hedge was also round about Job's house and all that he had on every side. What a cause for rejoicing. Satan is complaining about it! God had not only put His protecting care around Job but He had also blessed all that he had and did. It is one thing for God to see our hearts and to know that we are loyal to Him but who else can see when all about us is prosperity and blessing?

This glimpse into the heavenly court proceedings shows us not only the knowledge of Jehovah's complete control over the adversary, but some knowledge of the Devil's character, and his attitude toward the servants of God.

What is vitally important to ourselves today is that we are shown that the Devil sets his heart on every child of God who seeks to shun evil and to walk before the Lord with singleness of purpose. He will not cease to use every subtle wile to break our fellowship with God. Let us remember that Jesus, who has given us this eternal life is greater than all and he says,

‘No-one is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.’ (7)

So the Lord gives permission for the hedge around Job to be removed! Satan went forth it says and no doubt with joy or we could call it unholy glee. His plan had been carefully thought out - in detail - with all the skill that had been gained since he tempted Eve.

Job would never impulsively renounce his God, so he must be taken unawares and under heavy pressure of sudden loss. It would be in a time of joyful festivity. Men are not so likely then to be on guard. Dreadful news in the middle of happy events is even more appalling. The time would be carefully chosen; when the young people were all together and enjoying themselves. This greatest blow is kept to the last.

The true character of man is generally revealed in an hour of sudden crisis. With no time for thought, what is in the heart will suddenly break out - especially under the pressure of great anguish and pain.

When the enemy of our souls does get permission he will use his licence to the utmost.

Utter ruin was brought upon Job as far as all his earthly substance was concerned. That he was taken unawares is putting it mildly! But the alarming way the news was brought to him was extremely devastating on one hand but almost with boring repetition on the other.

Three times the words are said by the messengers; ‘I only am escaped alone to tell you.’ The coincidence of each thing happening so closely together, and each group of servants being slain with only one escaping, could well have suggested to Job that there were supernatural powers behind these sudden blows. He hardly had time to consider before the worst blow of all occurs. There is no softening of this awful news, ‘they are dead!’ All his wealth had gone and before he has time to realise the full extent of the devastation, another messenger arrives to tell him that in the midst of their festivities a strong wind had smitten the house in which his children were and buried them and the attendants in its ruins. It all sounds like today’s news. His children are swept into eternity in the middle of their enjoyment. No time to say goodbye, no last prayer for them or comforting word with them.

The effect upon Job is instantaneous.

‘Then Job arose . . . Fell down upon the ground, and worshipped;’ (1:20)

The heart of God must have been delighted but Job was unaware of the cloud of witnesses looking on. What sympathy and joy there must have been. God had not afflicted willingly and Job had stood the test. In his deep sorrow the outward signs of grief were there but his soul was anchored and safe in its refuge. He had rent his mantle and shaved his head in utter, outward devastation but his spirit worshipped the God who had hitherto given him nothing but blessing. He did not allow himself to commit the folly of speaking against God. It was the Lord who had given him everything. He had nothing that he had not received and the Lord had the sovereign right to take it all away. Whichever He did, Job would bless the Name of the Lord.

‘Touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face,’ (1:11) then says Satan to God. Was this challenge the original object that the fallen archangel, Satan, had in mind when he entered the audience chamber of the King? Had he already walked round the hedge and found no way to reach Job?

If it were possible to remove the hedge, he thought, he could make this so-called godly man as bitterly rebellious against the Lord as he was himself. This rebel archangel had once sought to exalt his throne above the stars of God. He had dared to say I will be like the most High.

Because of his presumption he had been cast down to hell. He had once been perfect in beauty, a day star, a son of the morning, but he had fallen from his high estate and become the arch-enemy of God. Was there hope then that this son of the earth, a member of the fallen race anyway, could be brought down with him? Such a daring accusation cannot be overlooked because it is said with the council of heaven listening and it means that the word of Jehovah is in question. The loyalty of Job has to be proved. All heaven shall then know that Jehovah can be loved and worshipped for Himself, even by a son of Adam.

We can, in fact, live through more than we think we are capable of doing. The adversary attacked poor Job’s body with a most repulsive and loathsome disease. Sore boils from head to foot. He was covered with one all-consuming inflammation. It was actually a form of leprosy called black leprosy or elephantiasis, as the feet swell like those of an elephant.

We must note for our own comfort, that Satan is absolutely under the control of God; he is unable to touch Job, his possessions, or his family without the direct permission of God. We will not be tempted or tried above that which we will be able to endure - ‘God is faithful,’ and ‘He will also make a way of escape.’ (8) The attack is carefully limited by the all-wise Creator. God Himself was sifting away the chaff around the true grain of wheat. It was all by the direct permission of the Lord.

So the stricken Job took a potsherd to scrape himself with and sat among the ashes. The afflicted man of the East would take himself to the ash-mound outside the village, feeling himself an outcast and an object of terror to others by reason of his loathsome condition. In the warm and dry land in which he lived, the dung would not be mixed with straw but carried outside, usually in baskets where it would possibly be burned. The rain would reduce the ashes to a solid mound of earth and the place used for a watch-tower, or a place of concourse by the inhabitants of the village. The outcast would be unfit to enter any dwellings so that he lay down at night sheltering among the ashes which the sun had warmed. The instrument he scraped himself with would be made for the purpose as the sores were too repulsive to touch. Who would recognise this loathsome outcast as the princely Job. He sat outside the village where he had once sat as chief. Men had looked up to him as the greatest of the children of the East. He was a nobleman with attendants to minister to his every wish - but not now.

Job's wife seems to have been the only one left to him. She had not opened her mouth before but her anguish at witnessing Job's suffering causes her to speak words that actually passed between God and Satan and thereby she takes the adversary's part. Our most faithful friends sometimes tempt us in the hour of trial. It is Job's integrity that is in question.

‘Why hold fast to all that. Renounce God and die!’ says she. (2:9)

Pity yourself! No-one can stand so much!

Peter said the same kind of words to the Lord Jesus when he spoke of the coming cross. But the Lord unhesitatingly knew the true source of the words and says, ‘Get behind Me, Satan.’ This is the devil's kind of wording and comes from the enemy's camp. It is obvious that his wife was loving and faithful but this now seems too much for her. There are few among us who know how to minister the comfort of God and we must learn sometimes to leave our fellow Christians in the hands of the Lord until we do. They must be encouraged to believe God and reach a deeper path of trust in trial. We often know little of the inward working of spiritual things and tend to look at the outward signs and the sight of the eyes and what we hear. Often we come to conclusions that are solely based on our own experiences. In many respects the story of Job coincides with our life today and the lives of our friends. We must be careful not to settle in our minds the cause of others troubles unless we have heard directly from God and have waited upon Him. We need to interpret to stricken and broken hearts and bodies the purposes of God in their afflictions.

Job rebukes his wife. In her grief she no longer sounds like the godly woman who shared his life.

Job begins to long for death and cries to God to let him alone, even in his anguish he refuses to part with the Anchor of his soul. By faith we must be still, under God's almighty hand, so that He may exalt us in due time. God may have given permission but we do not want to give Satan further permission by listening to his words.

God has not forsaken us at such times.

'Hope in God: for I shall yet praise
Him, who is the health of my
countenance and my God.' (9)

11. Job's Friends

In all probability Job had a lot more friends than these four about which we read.. In fact the end of the book describes the many close acquaintances who sought his fellowship again when it was all over. But these four were definitely different. They came to help. They were caring, loving, sensitive to a limited degree and, without doubt, under the hand of God. They had also taken some trouble to reach Job. There were a good many obstacles in the way and inconveniences to their own lives -- not the least the travelling. They had bothered to communicate to one another at the news and had set aside legitimate matters in their own affairs to give time to Job.

They had no idea how long their counselling would take but they were prepared to stay as long as necessary for Job's sake. They are to be commended.

Such friends do not come easily in this life.

To receive friendship it also has to be given and given freely. So here were four friends, drawn together because one was in distress. Motives were good. It may have been an intention to give financial assistance as well as advice and friendship. All these men were rich. 'Why do the rich have friends?' asks Proverbs in 14:20.

Well, no-one has friends if they are rich in goods, money, gifts or abilities if they keep it all to themselves. If we want to receive from others we must be giving people not only possessions but also gifts of character and talents.

Friend No. 1 Eliphaz or God is strength.

Eliphaz is the first of Job's three closest friends to speak. We could describe him as the candid friend. The friend we know very well in actual life who feels he must always say all his mind. The three friends had made an appointment together to come and comfort Job. Bad news travels fast! They had heard and had discussed together and settled among themselves how best he could really be helped out of his troubles.

Eliphaz is the one chosen for the delicate task of suggesting to him the conclusions they had come to. There is no doubt that the three friends were extremely sorrowful. They had rent their mantles, cast dust on their heads and sat down with him for seven days and seven nights. They saw his great grief from a distance and a long period of silence fell upon them. They became dumb in the presence of such unparalleled suffering.

Their discussions were stayed for awhile and it was apparent that Job was giving them no explanation and no word of welcome. Ordinary language and formalities have no place at such a time.

The words that Job actually poured out in anguish tell us something of the thoughts which had been filling his mind in those hours of silence. These three were intimate friends. It was out of the kindness of their hearts they had agreed to come. Their intention was to sympathise and to comfort.

Eliphaz starts with almost an accusation.

'If I try to speak to you, Job, will you be grieved? But who can help
Speaking after listening to all that you have said.' (4:2)

You have taught others, Job, helped them with all your words; strengthened and upheld those that were falling, and now, when you are put into the same circumstances, we see you fainting and troubled! You of all men should know how to trust God in the hour of trial. Is your knowledge of Him so small that it does not give you confidence in your desperate circumstances?

The adversary must be whispering this to Job without the help of his friend. He is sinking under his misery. He knows that he is fainting under the hand of God, and the memory of the way he had instructed others was surely adding to his agony of spirit. It is a bitter, extra pain to have the keen-eyed Eliphaz put all this into cold bare words. Our friends try to comfort but what they are doing is actually talking to the grief of the one whom God has already wounded.

The words Job poured out at last were concerning death and the grave. It is strange that the soul in trouble will often turn his thoughts this way.

'It is enough,' said Elijah, 'take away my life,' in his time of utter exhaustion. (1)

'It is too heavy for me,' 'kill me I pray you,' cried Moses with the pressure and burden of the people of Israel. (2)

‘It is better for me to die,’ said Jonah, (3) when the Lord did not fulfil the threatened judgement on Nineveh.

‘I wish I were dead,’ many have said in their times of pain and torment.

Job had not rebelled against the Lord but had come perilously near in using such language.

To long for death is a way of escape and is not the way to bow to the will of God.

Satan was the instigator of the temptation to speak against God that came to him from the lips of his wife when she spoke of Job’s giving up and dying.

It is a cloud that comes upon the mind through the enemy. There are some who have yielded to such thoughts in a time of deep anguish . . . They have been driven by the tempter of souls to take their own lives so as to reach this place of rest. Let the children of God stay themselves on their God, thanking Him for the great privilege of life itself and turn away from this temptation. Let them choose life even though it may be in a crucible of fire. We are, in a sense opening the door to the enemy when we consider peace in this way. It is a blessing of God that He has hedged us in, not the misery that Job called it.

When peace, like a river attends my way,
When sorrows, like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, You have taught me to know,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, if trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And has shed His own blood for my soul.

But Lord, ‘tis for You, for Your coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal: . . . (4)

Job had always known, it seems, that a testing time must come. He had shrunk from it however, and been afraid. He confesses that he had not been at ease in spite of the outward peace of his life. He had known that the furnace was inevitable, and now all that he had shrunk from had come upon him.

‘The thing that I greatly feared has come upon me,’ he says. (3:25)

Eliphaz feels he has an answer to all this. He can speak with assurance. His comfort is to tell Job in the plainest of language that he must be reaping the consequence of sin. None have ever perished or been brought to such extremities when they are innocent. God must be very angry with Job.

He could say this with conviction because he felt that the knowledge had come to him secretly, in a vision. He felt he was not speaking out of his own mind, but as one taught of God. Unfortunately the account and the language he uses savours much more of the devil as an angel of light than of the Holy spirit of God. Satan, who had the audacity to accuse Job to God before the heavenly assembly, and assert that Job would unfailingly renounce his faith in God, was not now likely to leave any means untried to bring about this end. Eliphaz states that he has learnt through this spirit-vision that no mortal man can be just and pure before his Maker. In effect he is saying, Job, you had better let go of your confidence that you have walked with God in the integrity of your heart. Your present experience proves that you are just the same as other men. You thought God protected and blessed you but after all you are reaping the consequences of your actions just as others do. You thought to walk uprightly and shun evil; but no man can be counted just before God and no man can be pure before his Maker.

This was the spirit voice whispering to Eliphaz at the very time that Jehovah was trusting His servant Job with the fullest possible confidence. God had borne witness before the council of heaven that in His sight Job was, 'blameless, true and godly, abstaining from everything evil.' 1:8

But the adversary is always accusing. This is his character. He is the accuser of the brethren. He will accuse man to man, man to God and God to man. He will malign God's character and misrepresent his attitude to the creatures He has made.

There are many like Eliphaz in these days, and some who would use his very words in describing things secretly brought to them - in the stillness of the night; communications from the spirit-world which they believe to be messages from God. They have sometimes no intention of forsaking the Lord, any more than Eliphaz had, but think that by this means they will get to know Him better. May God open their eyes to the devices of the devil and deliver them from this snare.

The vision of the night he speaks of has clearly not resulted in the spirit of pity and love which comes from fellowship with a God of love. His reasoning remains callous. He speaks of 'cursing and crushing in the gate with none to deliver' 5:3,4 The lying spirit has clearly misled Eliphaz and deceived him with half-truths.

It is true that mortal man is not pure before the Holy God, but the voice said nothing about the sacrifices continually offered which anticipate the cross - the one sacrifice of Christ in whom, and through whom, a man stands accepted before God. It is also true that man's life may be brief as the life of a moth, as he puts it, but it is not true that God lets him perish unregarded. The Son of God who came to declare the Father to us, tells His disciples:

'The very hairs of your head are all numbered.

You are of more value than many sparrows.’ (5)

Eliphaz appears to be a strange mixture. He certainly had some knowledge of God but was it all by theory? After his first words to Job, he deals with him a little more gently. In fact he draws a beautiful picture of the result of the Lord’s binding up of the wounds and the healing from the hands of the Almighty if only Job would truly seek Him and trust him and not despise His chastening:--

El-Shaddai, the pourer forth of blessing
would deliver him from every trouble that
would come upon him so that no evil would
touch him; ‘in famine he should be
saved from death, in war he should be saved
from the sword; the scourge of the tongue
would not touch him; he would not be afraid
of destruction; laughing at every danger and
fearless before the beasts of the field; his home
would be in peace, and protected by the power
of God; his offspring would be as the grass and
he would come to his grave in a full age. 5:19-26

Marvellous; wonderful; really very beautiful, dear Eliphaz. But this is all at the wrong time. It is not the time for Eliphaz to be urging the blessings of deliverance. The argument and the conclusions are wrong. All this would be Job’s if he would go back to God. But Job had never left Him. Eliphaz just did not understand.

Friend No. 2 or son of contention

The characters of the three friends of Job are shown very strikingly in their different speeches and method of dealing with Job. Eliphaz was possibly considered the most spiritual of the three. Perhaps this was because of his assurance that he was taught of God in the visions of the night. He is also the one who deals the plainest with Job in charging him with definite transgressions.

Bildad may be described as the very humble friend. He speaks the least and always very mildly and with limited scope to his arguments. He is generally a faint but definite echo of the other two.

He has great reverence for tradition and could not venture to assume that he knew anything more. Our fathers have searched out the truth, they have settled who is

upright, he says. Surely Job would bow his head and accept the teaching of authority. Would he presume to know God better than others of a former age? His revered ancestors? (8:8,9) Bildad was surprisingly like many today; content to take his knowledge second-hand. It looks like humility! Better and wiser men than he had said these things and he was satisfied to accept their conclusions.

Bildad draws for Job a picture of the paths of those who forget God but his illustrations are drawn from a limited area - the grass, the spider's web, the house and garden and the dust. His sphere had probably been a very narrow one and his mind and vision had remained correspondingly small. His words at this stage can only cause more pain. There is a sting in the way that this gentle friend uses the word 'if'.

'If your children have sinned against God . . .'

'If you would seek unto God . . .'

'If you were pure and upright . . .' (8:4,5,6)

The gentle friend who comes to put all things right for you suggests that if all was right with God, would He not deliver you? This is not relevant. In any case, the one who is doing the suffering has already cried to God to reveal if there has been any sin against Him.

Bildad, however, is a kind man, and in his way feels sorry for poor Job. He would like to give him a word of cheer. He tells him that God will yet fill his mouth with laughter. It sounds like modern day well-intentioned encouragement. Come on, cheer up! Worse things happen at sea. Or, there is always someone worse than you are. He has not the depth of mind and soul to know that deep anguish is not so easily dismissed. A man of Job's character and one who had walked with God could never be cheered by the thought of others coming to shame in the same or worse manner.

The words are hardly suitable for the once grave and dignified patriarch sitting as chief among his people.

'Of a truth I know it is so,' says Job quietly, letting Bildad go.

Friend No. 3 - Zophar or Hairy or Rough.

Zophar the third friend is thought to be the oldest of the three men, and to speak with the tone of extreme age. This may account for his blunt, almost rough, language.

Eliphaz had, as yet, only hinted of the conclusions they had come to and Bildad had gently echoes them but now Zophar brusquely speaks,

'Should a man full of talk be justified?' (11:2)

His indignation has been growing and he does not mince his words. He considers that it is time that Job was spoken to a little more plainly.

Gentle dealing with him is obviously in vain.

Zophar considers Job is full of talk and boastings. It is mockery for him to continue to appeal before God and Zophar wishes God would open His lips against it.

Job should not persist in saying his conscience is clear before Him and God is exacting from Job even less than his iniquity deserved. How a man could speak so boldly to Jehovah was beyond Zophar's comprehension. Did Job realise the greatness of the God he was appealing to so freely? Was Job, as a man, able to know the deep things of God? Was it possible to find out God by searching? Surely deeper than any mere man or his thoughts, God, Himself, could see men and knew their vanity.

Zophar sounds contemptuous; what use is it to talk to Job?

He continues with the same theme of the other two. If you were pure and upright, Job; if you would set your heart right; if only you would cry sincerely to God and put away sin, surely then, Job, you could lift up your head and be without fear.

The blunt friend is often a blessing!

Job had winced under Eliphaz' reproachful sarcasm and assumed spiritual authority. And under Bildad's gentle reasoning and desire to encourage, he had almost sunk into despair. The rough language of Zophar acts like a tonic, however.

'No doubt you are the people and wisdom dies with you!' he retorts. (12:1,2)

Job had indeed dwelt upon the omnipotence of God and faced out the question of how to be just before Him but had then sunk into a wail again that his days were few and he was a dying man. But Zophar stirs him to vigour. It arouses him. It stirs him to take a tenacious hold on God that will carry him through his trial. There is more life in his soul than he knows. He answers as sarcastically as his friend has spoken. He will not be a laughing stock nor will he accept this mocking. He knows he has walked with God, and been accepted by Him. Job certainly knows the greatness of God. All nature bears witness to it, so the words of Zophar are not particularly discerning or enlightening.

This third friend had wished that God would open His lips against Job but Job was not afraid of this, for he himself desired it with all his heart. His friend is apparently expressing himself in superior ways but it maybe showing more wisdom, feels Job, if they were all to acknowledge their ignorance and hold their peace!

They had sought to contend for God. They would not, however, have spoken to Job in his days of authority as they were now speaking to him while he sits on an ash-heap.

Zophar's harshness has thoroughly aroused Job. It is noticeable that his main idea is that the wicked must have their portion in this present world. The sinful man's prosperity will not endure and every man's hand would be against him. Presumably he has Job in mind but, just like the other two, he does not truly understand.

111. Job Himself

A) His Questions

1) How?

Job appears to be in the position of a man happy to walk with His God and have close fellowship with Him and is then suddenly asked, How? How can a man be just before God? Such a question is a severe test to a trusting heart. Job's walk has been a blessed childlike walk. He communes with himself about this.

What does it mean to have all this strange unbelief around him?
Why is his life being disturbed by people who want everything defined?
Aren't they content to take the word of God without these intellectual problems?
Must he face this painful element in his worship?
Does there have to be an answer to everything?
It is all part of the refining fire in his life.
The very foundations are being tried. Through it all we, and Job, will learn how to give a reason for the hope we possess, with meekness and fear.

'Even though I were righteous, I could not answer God,' says Job in chapter nine. 'He is God and I am but a man. How can I reason with Him when He is so great a God, so invisible, so all-powerful. He is breaking me; multiplying my wounds, almost without cause. He is not even allowing me to take a breath. He is filling me with bitterness!'

In this early stage of his book, it seems that Job did not know God as yet as the One who talked with him. He knew Him more in his inner consciousness as the great Holy One before whom he walked. He did not know, of course, that this path of great suffering would end in a revelation of God and fellowship with him higher and fuller than he had ever conceived possible in his days of prosperity.

As God is omnipotent and Job considered this he is brought to despair. If he was righteous and said he was perfect, Jehovah would prove he was perverse. (9:20)

The matter, therefore, is hopeless as he cannot justify himself, he simply despises himself and his life.

'It is all one.. He destroys the perfect and the wicked.' (v.22)

In fact it almost appears that God, who controls all these things, mocks at the calamity of the innocent and hands over all the good of the earth to the wicked. Job is getting lower and lower before God. The distance between the Creator and the finite creature that He has made is too great.

2) Why?

The need of the human heart has always been the same. Job knew how to offer burnt offerings to God and through them, understand that he was accepted, but in his hour of greatest trial he begins to long for a mediator between himself and Jehovah. God appears so far off. Surely someone could plead on his behalf and give him understanding from heaven.

'Show me why you contend with me,' he cries. (10:2)

'Are you judging me like these men and searching me for some secret sin? Why would God do that?' he says, 'when He knows I am not wicked?' (10:7)

He knows His Lord's character enough to know He will not overlook any wickedness. But although he is righteous, God still does not hearken to his voice. And why did He let him live at his birth in the first place? (10:18)

He is in God's hand and God has preserved him and yet all this suffering was hidden in God's heart. His words were like those of David's when he wrote Psalm 102.

'I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of Thy indignation and Thy wrath: for Thou hast lifted me up and cast me down.'

This is our common prayer. It is the prayer of the afflicted one when he is overwhelmed and has to pour out his complaint to God.

3) When?

It seems to Job that the higher a man goes in life the lower he will sink when God touches him. Kings are reduced to slaves and the strong are weakened. Princes receive contempt and the insight of old age is removed. It is as though God waits until a people or nation is at its height before He brings them low.(12:23)

'Will God break a leaf when it is driven? (13:25)

Just when he is most needed, God hides His face.

'Now that I am so frail, ' says poor Job, 'must you be so harsh with me.

He is beginning to realise how short life is, how rotten, how like dry stubble or moth-eaten it is. Job compares the frail life of man to a flower which springs forth and is cut down just as quickly. (14:2)

When? Is there a set time when God will speak and remember him and restore His favour to him?

If he could but be sure of this he would wait patiently all the days of the conflict until his release would come. If only he could know that a time would come when God would call and answer him. Surely that would ease the present pain.

He talks of another life when he would know God's reward. In such a state a man cannot notice anything going on around him but he does know that 'even a tree cut down will sprout again.'

With God appearing to be counting his steps and watching minutely for sin, he is learning in his affliction what he did not know in his prosperity. Well, at least he feels at last he will wait until God does speak to his dilemma.

B) Job's Humiliation and defeat

All the talk from his friends and all his own questions have quite worn him down. Job is feeling the prolonged trial is destroying every bit of hope. He can only feel his own pain. His miserable comforters have not consoled him one bit. In fact Job's persistent clinging to the fact that God knew his life and would vouch that he walked with Him in integrity of heart, had continually aroused their indignation.

He knew that his prayer had been sincere but now -

'I have covered myself with sackcloth and defiled my horn -
(the symbol of authority and dignity) - in the dust. My
face is foul with weeping . . .and I have humbled myself.' (16:15,16)

What else could Job say? He knew also the awfulness of the adversary fixing his eye on a soul in the furnace of a trial. Jeremiah knew the same.

'I have heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Denounce,
and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, they that watch
for my halting.' (1)

The enemy of our souls works through human instruments. Job clearly means this when he says,

'They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me
upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together
against me.' (16:10)

His spirit is spent. He turns away from his friends and reminds himself that it does not much matter what they think for his days are almost over.

The grave is ready for him. It is mockery to continue discussing the matter. His friends cannot answer for him. He must rest upon God as the first cause of everything. It is God who has hid from them the understanding needed. Job ponders that God would not exalt them after they had denounced a friend for their own gain, the gain of being considered right in their condemnation of him. After all he thinks it is better that they should say what they think than try to deceive him by flattery. It is God who has permitted all this and allowed him to become an open abhorring.

'One in whose face they spit . . .
His eye is become dim, his breath is
corrupt and his body wasting to a shadow.' (17:7)

Job still maintains that though his body grows weak, if a man's ways are clean and his conscience clear before God, 'the inner man will wax stronger.' (17:9)

We watch Job slowly ceasing from struggling and coming to the place of rest. So long as we writhe in our afflictions so long do we prolong them. God would have us lie down and rest in His faithfulness. We can, with Job, take our place in the dust and acknowledge that we are corrupt from our nativity. Our God is watching us in the deep darkness where He has brought us. We must lie down and be still.

Let us that fear the Lord and walk in darkness, stay ourselves on God and not seek to kindle a fire by our own efforts. If we will wait upon our God we will once again be satisfied with his favour and the fullness of His blessings. This lonely man begins to find himself desolate. He cries to his friends to go, as he cannot find a wise one among them. There is nothing before him but the grave. They have all returned to their same theme.

Eliphaz continues to rely upon his spirit-voice, proving that visions given to the soul by the adversary do not result in deliverance from the power of sin; whereas the Holy spirit reveals the truth of God for the one purpose of freeing the sinner from his sins. Satan is quite satisfied that Eliphaz should believe in the utter corruption of fallen man so long as he remains in it. Eliphaz is only able to assert that man is corrupt and filthy and cannot hope to be righteous before God. He cannot explain it further so he keeps to the tradition he has been taught by the fathers.

Bildad once more describes for the afflicted Job the fate of the ungodly and once more his illustrations are drawn from a very limited sphere. His one idea of blessing from God is prosperity in his 'tent', i.e. his family and his own personal circle and in having a name in the street in which he lives! It is inevitable that Job should be misunderstood. How could his friend understand the depth of Job's surrender.

'The question as to how a man can be just before God is still upon Bildad's mind. His words do not seem very appropriate at this stage. If, asks Job, Bildad did not know how to find acceptance with God and how to have a clear conscience before him, what right had he to come with his negatives to a man in affliction What help could he give without power?

What kind of salvation had he to offer to one who had no strength to save himself? And what counsel had he for one in perplexity and darkness? (ch.26)

Zophar too, is still speaking out of his own understanding. He even considers at one point that the exultation of Job's spirit is the emotional joy of the godless.

Job is obliged to confess that God's hiding Himself is the bitterest trial of all. Whichever way he moves, forward, backward, to the left or to the right, he cannot perceive a trace of God's presence or His workings. He realises it is useless labouring to find him when he withdraws Himself from the consciousness. No agonising in prayer or writing in self-effort can compel God to unveil His face. There is no possibility of keeping up appearances now. Jehovah has broken him down on every side.

God has hidden Himself from him and he does not know why.

'Behold I go forward, but He is not there;
And backward, but I cannot perceive him . . .
He hides Himself on the right hand,
That I cannot see him.' (23:8,9)

C) Job's Faith

Job knows about the refining of gold by fire. Now he knows that there is a trial by fire for the gold of God's elect and true gold will stand the fire and only lose the dross which must be purged away. He had writhed under the charges of evildoing and bitterly cried to God to show him his transgressions but from the moment he sees his Redeemer to be his heavenly vindicator, his spirit rests in calm assurance and dependence upon God. He knows now that Jehovah was only trying him not punishing him as his friends had said.

This is Job's turning point. His spirit is suddenly set free. Sunken on the dung heap, apparently forsaken of God and man, a loathsome wreck of skin and bone, he has the glorious assurance that he shall yet see God. A real and prophetic vision -- I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and after worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold.' (19:25,26)

He has not only been given a glimpse into things to come for his own heart's comfort but, moved by the Holy Ghost, he has prophesied of the Resurrection and coming again in glory of the crucified Redeemer. His faith becomes more and more bold. 'Beloved, if our heart condemn us not then we have confidence toward God.' (2) is the New Testament explanation.

Job's feet begin to walk on the high places of God's truths. He has not turned aside but has held fast to God's ways and, even more, he has esteemed the words of God's mouth more than his necessary food.

Such words remain in his heart and cannot be effaced. He has found them of more value to spirit, soul and body than the body's necessities. (23:12)

The Lord Jesus Christ knew this when He said to the tempter,

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' (3)

He can now say with confidence instead of fearfulness that God would perform all that He intends to do. There were many more purposes to be fulfilled. The immutable God could not be hindered or turned aside from them. There is still trembling at the thought of all that is in the heart of God for him but he now knows that all that has happened is to make his own heart soft.

It is only through the fire that a soft and melted heart can be obtained. All natural power of endurance and self-restraint must go.

The once dignified Job had not been able to hide his sufferings behind a barrier of reserve as we so often do. Nor had he been able to protect himself from the humiliation of his pleading for pity from his friends, or even of weeping like a child. 'I will gather you, blow upon you in the fire of wrath and you shall be melted' (4) Is God's message through Ezekiel to Israel.

A soft heart has lost resistance to the hand of God, not only in the will, that may be dealt with very early in our Christian lives, but also in an involuntary hardness that makes us small and narrow.

'Be enlarged,' (5) writes Paul to the Corinthians.

The heart can only be enlarged when it is softened and melted by the fire. Job's heart is also comforted by considering and pondering the ways of God in His dealing with men and how He has His own times and His own day. His friends are gently told that they must understand God's dealings by faith if they say they know Him!

Job has an anchor of faith. It does not fail him now. It has been there all along but now the iron is entering into his soul. In spite of bitterness, strength and more strength is to come. His faith is being tested more than he seems able to bear, but, cries Job, 'If I cannot see God, He can see me!'

It is a revelation. It is almost unendurable, but 'He knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.' (23:10)

In spite of all the physical suffering, we see again and again how Job is made to understand his position by the inner teaching of the Spirit of God. We can continually discern the difference between the inner and the outer man all through his language.

The inner spirit of the man breaks out in tenacity of faith which assures him that in the face of outward things he is still in the hand of God. In this moment of deepest despair he is anchored afresh on the Rock. He has come to a place where, although his friends are still dealing with him as a transgressor, he is able to steadfastly rest in the faithfulness of his God.

D) Job's Past

Poor Job. However, he is not to be pitied but to be envied. But having silenced his friends he now gives himself up to the luxury of dwelling on his happy past.

‘Oh that I were as in months past.’

Strangely, these first words in chapter twenty-nine, reveal that there is a further stage of surrender to God yet to be learned.

He had without hesitation bowed to the will of God when blow on blow came upon him at the beginning of his great trial. It did not occur to him then to let his mind dwell upon past experiences. He did not think of craving for their return. But through yet more pain and testing there was to be a full abandonment to God and an entire acceptance of His will.

It needs a very thorough surrender to the will of God, for any of us in the furnace of trial, never to look back with regret to the past. Or, for that matter, never to look forward with any wish for the future.

It is not easy to see that any such regrets or desires are not consistent with a true and complete abandonment of our whole being to God. The enemy of our souls knows this and has a persistent way of endeavouring to occupy our minds with what we once were and do not seem to be now. Or what ought to be and do not seem to have now.

Compering ourselves with ourselves is a fatal hindrance to resting at present in the will of God. The main cloud Job grieves about is his loss of fellowship with God. His memory goes back to days when he had assurance and knew that the Lord was watching over him.

He had the light of God on his path and was able to walk with Him through any darkness. Job knew what he had lost but he did not yet realise what he was to gain. He remembers how the light of God was over him and above him but he was to lose all this for a deeper and more intimate knowledge of God Himself. He had walked almost by sight before. His path had been illuminated. Now he would be led out of

that into a walk by faith alone; only possible when faith rests on the character of God.

There is a certain kind of pain when we must walk through darkness with no light on the path at all. Job was suffering as we all must, when being led by the spirit out of the path of illumination into the walk of pure faith in the faithful One. He did not know how much he had relied upon the light of God rather than by God Himself.

During his sickness Job regarded his past experience as the ripest stage of his spiritual life. But he was mistaken. Later on his vision would be clearer. He would see the days of rich fruitfulness were before him.

The time of youth both in the natural sense and in the spiritual sense is very lovely. It is full of fervour and freshness; devotion, energy and life. It is, however, also full of impulsiveness and assumption of knowledge. It is a loveliness of possibility rather than fulfilment. In days to come Job will look back upon his past with gratitude at the joy and brightness but he will see greater beauty in a matured faith that walks with God in calm and quiet trust.

Job was dwelling, too, upon the day when the friendship of God, as he says in chapter 29:4,5 - 'was upon my tent.'

He did not realise that Jehovah was never more his friend than now. The Lord never watches over His servants more closely than while they are in the fire. He certainly does not let His eyes leave the fining-pot when the precious gold of His redeemed servant is being refined by fire.

Job thinks of the days when he had rejoiced in meeting every stumbling block in the road of life because each one had been a fresh occasion of blessing from God. The hard rocks of difficulty poured out rivers of oil, he says. (29:6)

Job also remembers the days when his reputation as a man of God was noised abroad. He was looked up to by old and young alike and all classes of society. The young feared him and the aged stood up at his presence as a mark of respect. Even princes and nobles ceased their talk when he drew near so as to listen more readily if he had anything to say. It is a great honour to be respected on account of a close walk with God. The reverence, even if unconsciously, is given to God.

Character carries weight.

'A man's gift (of the Holy Spirit) makes room for him,' says Proverbs 18.

It seems that he was so great that the Lord may have had to withdraw him from the sight of men for awhile. It had to be made evident that he had nothing but that which was given to him from above; that he himself possessed no good thing.

The life of service that Job experienced was also a cause of great joy.

‘When the ear heard me, it blessed me . . .
because I delivered the poor that cried,
the fatherless also . . . The blessing of him
that was ready to perish came upon me:
and I caused the widow’s heart to sing! (29:11-13)

All who were in trouble came to Job. They loved him for his life of unselfish toil. He genuinely gave himself to the service of others. Job’s sketch of his life reaches its highest beauty at this point. Next to the joy of satisfying the heart of Christ, there is no joy on earth so sweet as ministering to those who are ready to perish, and causing lonely hearts to sing for joy. Job looked back on a time of privileged service with a great longing to be entrusted with it again.

It is thought that Job was about one hundred years old at the time this happened to him. Such fellowship with God and such knowledge of his resources in Him, his ripened judgement and courage in the service of others, could only have been the result of years of obedient walking before the Lord. The powerful service that he describes could not have been in a time of spiritual childhood.

He knew that his inner life was deeply rooted in God and open to living waters. The dew of the Spirit was silently resting on him continually, keeping him like an evergreen tree, untouched by drought. He was continually being re-equipped by the power of God for the conflict with sin and the powers of darkness. Instead of being weakened by the exercise, he was renewed. Job was truly a prophet in his time. It was not human eloquence that made men give ear, and wait, and keep silence while he spoke. (29:21)

Paul, in New Testament days, would have called it a gift of utterance. (6)
Job had a power to command a hearing; the intense silence which is peculiar to a company when hearing an utterance of the Spirit. It also gave the conviction of the Spirit that subdues opposition; a thirst was aroused; and expectancy in the hearers; faith and receptivity of heart; the whole being opened wide to receive the latter rain of the holy Spirit. This was the God-given authority of the messenger so that the light of God shone on his countenance, as it did with Stephen before the counsel in Jerusalem. Acts 6:15

The adversary’s challenge to Job is well timed. Job is in a precarious position. He concludes his reminiscing by saying ‘I sat as chief and dwelt as a king 29:25. Such a position of power is perilous for any man. The scriptures faithfully record all the perils as well as the privileges. Job is not indifferent to this.

Paul knew the danger when he said that he had been given a thorn in the flesh, lest through the greatness of the revelations he might become exalted and finally lose his crown. (7)

Even so, as we read Job's description of his experience and life, we can confirm that his sufferings were not the consequences of transgression or disobedience but by the will of God and for the development of faith.

But what good was he now as an outcast sitting on an ash heap?

E) Job's Foreshadowing of the Cross

The apostle Paul more than once speaks of the gospel as an eternal purpose of the ages; (Eph. 3:11) kept secret since the world began; (Romans. 16:25)

The hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world; (1 Cor. 2:7)

and at last manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim. 1:10)

The silence through the ages has now and again been broken by some brief word from the lips of a man walking in close fellowship with God. It is written that the gospel was preached beforehand unto Abraham. (8) It was also revealed by the Spirit unto Job, not in the full light given to Paul but clearly enough for Job's own walk with God. He might not have been able to explain the full meaning of sacrifice as the ground of access to God but he knew the effect of it in his life. While he is in this great trial he learns experimentally the faith in the resurrection.

Abraham was given the same knowledge in his supreme hour of trial. He offered up Isaac, accounting that God is able to raise him up even from the dead, and he offered him up by faith.

Such a faith the Lord Jesus sought to awaken in Martha at the tomb of her brother. All through the ages we can trace the faith of the resurrection given to those who come to a time of supreme surrender and sacrifice to God. It seems that the hour of deepest anguish and suffering is the time when the spirit is free to find a realm of knowledge of God not otherwise possible.

Job confidently speaks of a living Redeemer Who will be his vindicator in the day when He comes to judge the world. In this crucible of unparalleled suffering, brought down, as he says, to the skin of his teeth, he can cry, 'I know that my Redeemer lives.'

His soul is filled with consuming desire for that day when he will see Him face to face. He will then be a friend and not a stranger. Job is being led step by step into a walk of faith more precious to God than gold that perishes. A faith that will be found unto glory and honour at the Lord's appearing.

In the New testament the grain of wheat falling into the ground to die will bring forth much fruit.

In Paul's experience the sentence of death was on all that he was in himself. He had to rely only on the resurrection power of God. This corresponds to this stage in Job's history. The history of this man is not only a pattern of the ways of the Lord with his children but also a shadow of the Christ who was to come.

Isaiah fifty-three is a prophecy plainly depicting a suffering Messiah.

‘ . . . We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted . . .
He had done no violence . . . yet it pleased the Lord to bruise
Him.’ (4 - 10)

There is an inner harmony of the scriptures in the picture of Job.

We can perceive the same spirit working with the same truth in unbroken unity from Genesis to Revelation. It is a reiterated message of death and resurrection. The way of the cross was trodden by Christ in His passage from earth to heaven on our behalf. It was the way for Job to reach a life more abundant and it is still the way of life for every one of us as we look for the second appearing of our glorified Lord.

Chapter thirty traces the story of the cross in Job's experience.

‘They abhor me . . . and spare not to spit in my face.’ V.10

It appears that a crowd had gathered around the dunghill. Just such a mixed rabble was around the Lord. Base men were found to testify against Him. They even spoke of Him a ‘this fellow’! He was the song of drunkards. Thieves were crucified with him.

Job had spent his life blessing the poor and now the outcasts gaze upon him - abhor him for his repulsive condition and triumph in his downfall.

It was written of Christ - ‘all they that see me laugh me to scorn, they shoot out the lip, they shake the head.’ Psalm 22:7

‘Dogs have compassed Me; the assembly of evildoers have enclosed Me.’ V.16

‘My soul is poured out with me’ cries Job. (30:16)

‘He poured out His soul unto death’ Isaiah 53:13 was written of the Lord.

‘My bones are pierced in me in the night seasons: and my sinews (pains) take no rest’ Job 30:17

‘I am become like dust and ashes’ Job 30:19

‘They pierce my hands and my feet’ Psalm 22:16

‘Thou hast brought Me to the dust of death,’ cries the son of Man. Psalm 22

Psalm 22: 1,2 is the cry of the One who was smitten of God on our behalf.

‘My god, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’

‘I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night . . .’

There is a striking similarity in their paths of suffering but there we must leave it.

There is an equally striking dissimilarity in their endurance of suffering. We know in our own lives there is a shrinking from pain and false condemnation from our fellow human beings.

But the whole life pathway of the Lord Jesus Christ shows a calm and steadfast acceptance of all that was keenly painful to him as a man. He humbled himself, not only in taking on himself the form of a man but in every step of the way. He was obedient unto death. In a far greater measure than Job, the Lord had caused hearts to sing for joy. He had spoken gracious words that man could never speak and spent out His life in ministry to all who were in sorrow and trouble. Those who should have been his friends, charged him with blasphemy and condemned him as a sinner and deceiver. Christ, unlike Job, answered nothing.

‘He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth’ (9)

Job cries, in the hour of his greatest anguish,

‘Thou dost not answer me . . . Thou art turned to be cruel unto me’ 30:20

His spirit has at last been touched, he has lost his inner anchor and is fainting under the hand of God.

Self-vindication follows.

F) Job’s self-Vindication

At this point it is thought that Job rose to his feet and, lifting his hands toward heaven in typical oriental fashion took a solemn oath - ‘the oath of clearing.’ It would not be surprising in his condition.

At an earlier stage of his trial when describing his pitiable condition to Bildad, he had completely broken down and pleaded for pity from his friends. Then his spirit was suddenly freed and given a triumphant faith in his living Redeemer so that he was thereafter anchored firmly in God. He was then far above all the attacks from his friends and would-be helpers. He had remained with his heart steadfast until he began to dwell on his happy past. Then the contrast so fills his mental vision that he loses sight of the faithfulness of God, sinks back into himself, and drops into miserable self-pity and self-absorption.

The unhappy Job lies on the ash-heap absorbed in the meditation of his sorrows. His mind is revolving around himself and he is sinking deeper and deeper into despondency and despair. He has no language to describe his misery. Weeping, he suddenly rises; he will vindicate himself and by a solemn declaration before God, he will finally clear himself from all the charges brought against him by this friends.

His attitude to sin:

Job first asserts that he had made a fixed determination to so guard his eyes that he would not even look at anything that might lead him into sin. In this he shows his knowledge of one of the very first conditions for walking in fellowship with God. The Lord Jesus plainly puts the same conditions in the sermon on the mount. A look and a desire is counted before God, He says, as one or as the actual committal of the sin. (10)

His attitude to the world:

Job has kept far away from the vanity, emptiness and deceit of the world. In spite of anything he may have been compelled to see around him he had been separated unto God and had not touched any unclean thing. He was willing to be tried in the balance by God Himself. His singleness of purpose in all these matters may be proved. (31:6) 'Let me be weighed . . . That God may know my integrity.'

His attitude to his neighbour:

Chapter 31:13-23 describes Job's account with his servants and neighbours. The servants had found him a good master. When they explained he had always listened, he remembered he had to give account of his dealings with them to God. He had always responded to the poor when asked for help. He had not been selfish and considered his own needs. He had not said 'go in peace and be warmed and filled,' without thought of the necessities for others. He had never oppressed the fatherless, nor taken advantage of his position of authority to crush or injure those who had no helper.

His attitude to wealth:

Job acknowledges that God had prospered him in the things of this world and had increased his substance in the land but with sincerity of heart he could say that he had not made gold his hope or his confidence. It had not been his first love in the world and he had never rejoiced because his wealth was great. He had not gloried in his possessions.

His attitude to idolatry:

Job could say that he had been true to God even in the middle of the idolatry of the nations around him. He had beheld the sun and gazed on the beauty of the moon in the star-lit heavens but his heart had never been secretly tempted to worship them. His hand had not kissed his mouth in the usual obeisance offered to the sun and moon in those days. This would have been iniquity to him and denial of the God above.

His attitude to his enemy:

Job could testify that he had not been delighted at the downfall of an enemy. He had been so free from the spirit of revenge that he had not suffered his mouth to sin.

Even though those around him had, Job would never be guilty of enticing others to fight on his behalf.

Job was prepared to sign his name to every word that he had said. In fact he would take any indictment that the enemy had written and with princely dignity accept it as a crown and lift it upon his shoulder. (31:36) He would declare that his steps had been in the way of the Lord.

In brief, Job asserts that in every department of his life he had walked uprightly and in integrity and singleness of heart. He had lived his life straight before God and men. In Job's long vindication of himself the personal pronouns - I, me, my, mine, appear over eighty times! It is a self-vindication but the three friends were not convinced. The attempt to clear his own character appeared to them to be self-righteous.

Oh, dear. Job's trial has unveiled an aspect of all our lives that can only be revealed after intense suffering. The self-life is extremely subtle and no child of God can safely vindicate his own integrity. God alone can bear witness as we humbly leave our character in His hands. Each stage of spiritual growth has its own temptations and perils and these deeper aspects of the inner life of self can only be seen after an experience of power and fruitful service.

Job had shown a submission to the will of God and a tenacious faith which were very beautiful. He had a clearness of conscience and an endurance which were wonderful but he also showed that he was unknowingly allowing the gifts of God to become more to him than the will of God.

He was in danger of grasping to himself the very power that God had given him and making it appear to others that he was righteous in his own eyes.

The apostle Paul walked with God as closely as Job. He had also lived in deep trials from the first moment of his knowledge of God.

'I know nothing against myself,' he writes to the Corinthians,

'Yet I am not hereby justified: but He that judges me is the Lord.' (11)

The Spirit of God did not bear witness to Job's self-vindication.

1V. Job's Extra Friend - Elihu (or God Himself)

A) As a Messenger of God

There was a younger man listening to all that had passed between Job and his friends. He had not been mentioned before, possibly because he was considered too young to be noticed.

Nevertheless it is apparent that he possessed a spiritual discernment unknown by the elder men.

God does hide His secrets from the wise of this world and reveal them to babes.

He also chooses the weak and despised so that no flesh shall glory before Him.

Joseph was taught of God and led through suffering while his elder brothers are left to be shepherds. The little ones of Israel cross the Jordan into the promised land while the unbelieving elders die in the wilderness.

In this ancient story of Job we see the young Elihu chosen as God's messenger to the afflicted Job.

It is pleasant to notice Elihu's modesty and tact as he enters into the painful discussion. His wrath was kindled, as he says, against Job and his friends and as the constraining spirit was upon him he was ready to burst! (32:18,19)

He perceived that Job was becoming more and more concerned about clearing his own character rather than justifying the love and wisdom of God in laying His hand on him. He saw, too, that the aged friends had utterly failed to find an answer to Job's complaints, or explain to him God's purpose yet they had condemned him without mercy. Elihu is conscious that he is in a very delicate position for a young man. However is he to speak to these dignified seniors? A true messenger from God, he holds himself back and waits for the right moment. If the Spirit of God has indeed chosen him to be an interpreter, then he will wait until God Himself opens the way for him.

At last there is a pause. The three friends of Job cease to speak and also, at last, the words of Job are ended.

The constraining hand of God comes upon Elihu and he opens his lips.

He takes at once the lowly place, acknowledges his youthfulness and confesses how he has shrunk from speaking before such great men. Having thus cleared the ground as it were, he speaks boldly. However much he shrinks back and feels the position he is placed in is difficult, he has no alternative but to deliver the burden on his soul. He begs their forbearance if he does not speak as respectfully as he could wish but he also desires not to respect any man's person which would prevent him giving a true message. If he waited to give flattering titles and he allowed the dignity of his audience to hinder his faithfulness, his Maker would soon put him aside. (32:22)

He has waited and then paused once but no response comes from his astonished elders.

He looks for words of encouragement. The frigid silence must not make him unfaithful. He must not withhold the light that has been given him. So, with courtesy, Elihu now addresses himself to Job.

Job has expressed a wish for an umpire, so according to that request, Elihu would endeavour to be to Job in God's stead. He would seek to be a mouthpiece for God. Elihu rapidly sums up the case and uses Job's words for the purpose.

Job has said that he is innocent and God is dealing with him as an enemy! Elihu by passes all the theoretical discussion and says in effect, Job is saying all the wrong must be on God's side.

Job has been placing the Lord God of Hosts in an impossible position. Why does he enter into battle with him? As his Creator, He cannot give an account to Job of His dealings with him.

No agonising or striving on Job's part would make any difference in compelling God to give an account of His actions.

This did not mean that God never spoke at all.

The trouble was that men did not understand His way of speaking, nor give sufficient heed to regarding His voice. They are dull of hearing.

B) How God speaks - 1

'God speaks in one way, yes, in two,
Though man perceives it not.' (33:14)

Elihu describes two different methods the Lord uses in instructing His children in the school for training them to know Him and His will.

One is by the direct inner teaching of the Holy spirit in the heart. 'In a dream, in a vision of the night,' (v.15) when the child of God in deep slumber upon the bed, is separated from earthly duties and interests.

Then the Spirit gently uncovers the inner ear of the heart and seals the instruction of God.

The Lord explains to Job, by the mouth of Elihu, the characteristics of the true teaching of the Spirit of God, in contrast to the vision described to him by Eliphaz. The contrast is very striking. God softly and gently opens the inner ear and makes the heart receptive.

How terrorising the vision described by Eliphaz. Fear and trembling came upon him and the hair of his flesh stood up with horror. But this is different. The Lord Jesus was the perfect pattern of the servant with the opened ear - One Who was

'Wakened morning by morning, He wakens
my ear to hear as they that are taught.' (1)

This kind of gentle teaching is sealed on the heart by the eternal spirit. The silent instruction described by Elihu is only possible to those truly surrendered and made soft and pliable as melted wax, melted by the fire.

All struggling must have ceased and the will brought into quiet harmony with God, with a clear atmosphere between Him and the soul. The object of all God's speaking, says Elihu, is to 'hide pride from man' (33:17)

Self-will and pride describe the two strongest characteristics of fallen man as inherited from the first Adam. The second Adam, the Lord from heaven, completed the work of redemption on the cross. We know, however, within ourselves how much patience is needed by God, our Father, before the fruit of that work is seen; how long it takes until we are truly conformed to the image of the Son. We know how patient He has been before the citadel of our will is gained for Him; and how much longer does He watch and wait until the whole being is so possessed by Him that we are content to simply fulfil the will of God. An ever-deepening work of God is needed to enable us so to renounce ourselves and our own life, that we may share in His abundant life.

C) How God speaks - 2

‘He is chastened with pain . . . (33:19)

The second way Elihu describes in which God speaks to His children, is by putting them in the school of suffering. The words he uses confirm Job’s belief that his sufferings have come from the hand of God.

It is the Lord, says Elihu, who speaks to the one chastened by pain. The word ‘chastened’ is the same as the word ‘convicted.’ In almost every other passage of scripture it means to instruct or train up a child as a parent would do.

The conviction goes deep when the Father burns it in as by fire. The Lord withdraws a man from his natural purposes; lays His hand on him and strips him of all his vigour and strength, so that he loses desire even for bread and meat. The outward man wastes away until the soul is poured out and he lies at the very edge of the grave. His life hangs, as it were, by a thread. The destroyers, Elihu mentions in verse 22, must wait for the permission from the Lord as He alone has the keys of death and none can pass through the gates without His word.

The servant of God is face to face then with eternity. The work he has been withdrawn from disappears into the dim and fading past. The surrender to God in the days when he was strong is being tested.

Does he truly desire the will of God above the work of God?

Will he actually, like Paul, glory in his weakness, that the power of Christ might rest upon him? (2)

We ought not to assume that the picture drawn in detail by Elihu needs to be fulfilled in the experience of every one of us. The picture is a general one, expressing the simple lesson that an all-wise Father teaches His children by affliction.

He deals with each one of us according to character and need, as well as by the direct heart instruction of the Spirit.

Without doubt there are depths within us which can only be reached in this way. If we shrink back from following God we may possibly remain untaught in the richest and deepest knowledge. These things maybe inward and spiritual and known only to God and ourselves and not seen by any other person.

But whatever way it will be God's way, whatever way He wills.

In these conditions of weakness, can we know the divine strength brought to full development? We know, of course, that it is for the sake of being able to minister to the needs of others.

It is written that Christ Himself, as our High Priest, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because on earth He was in all points tried just as we are. (3)

D) How God speaks - 3

'Deliver him . . . I have found a Ransom.' (33:24)

Elihu says in verses 29 and 30 in chapter 33,

'All these things God works twice, yea thrice, with a man to bring his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of life.'

In this one of the gleams of light that so marvellously brings out the inner harmony of the scriptures?

The three days so often met with in various parts of the old and new testaments is generally understood to foreshadow the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Lord Himself said -

'As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale,
so shall the son of Man be . . . (4)

Does Elihu's language mean that God works twice in bringing soul into fellowship with Christ in His death, but that the thrice of Resurrection is needed before we can know abundant life with the Risen Lord? Elihu also speaks again and again in his discourse of the 'soul' and the 'life'.

Paul describes the difference between soul and spirit and it is not the soul that Elihu speaks of when he mentions the pit. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:45 -

'The first man Adam became a living soul.
The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.'

And in Hebrews 4 the word of God, in its working out, is said to divide between the soul and spirit, piercing as a sharp knife!

The soul life, therefore, is the life that we derive from Adam but the Lord Jesus Christ quickens the spirit life and brings it into union with Himself.

The word of God divides these two and reveals the soul life in its true light, so that it may be hated and renounced; surrendered to the cross, where it is put to death, and then continually exchanged for eternal life in union with our Saviour.

The new testament passages throw strong light on Elihu's message to Job.

Job has seen his Lord as the Redeemer. Now he is to see Him as the Ransom. This is the One who will be gracious to him and deliver him from going down into the pit; not on the ground of Job's integrity but on the ground of God's own sacrifice for the redemption of fallen man.

'I have found a Ransom', (33:24)

Is now the message of God to Job, foreshadowing the cross. The unparalleled sufferings of Job reveal an aspect of the life of self not seen in days of prosperity and power. The turning point of his deliverance must come to him by a fresh appreciation of the Ransom - the death of the son of God.

Through this atoning sacrifice alone can grace flow and the word be spoken 'deliver him.'

It will be followed by the imparting of the new life in Christ Jesus, fresh and sweet as a child's.

Job had been such a great man. How could he ever become as a little child? It could not happen while he retained his place as chief and sat as a king. He is being led into a life of child-communion with the Father that he had not known before. He has known a friendship with God but he is going to have access to Him, says Elihu, in His sanctuary where he will 'See His face with joy.' (33:26)

and know that he has whatever he asks from Him.

After these wonderful Spirit-given interpretations of God's way of teaching His children, Elihu earnestly asks Job to speak again for he wants to help him further. But Job is silent.

E) Elihu Speaks for Himself

Elihu waits for some response again from Job but in vain. Turning to the friends, Elihu appeals to them as men with knowledge. Job will not acknowledge that all Elihu has said is right so he asks the wise men to discuss the matter with him. He has interpreted Job's silence as scorn. Elihu was no doubt manifestly under the anointing of the holy Spirit when he proclaims deliverance to the afflicted Job through the Ransom. He also speaks then with diffidence and tactful tenderness but now that he has poured out his heart and no response comes from anyone at all, his sensitiveness appears to be severely touched.

Elihu was so sure that he had the light of the spirit on Job's path that he probably expected an immediate result! He was certainly deeply taught in the things of God. But he, himself, is now being tested by the silence. He is suddenly overcome with impatience. In dealing with others we often fail as Elihu did. If those we seek to help yield at once to our message we are full of joy. If, however, through

some reserve of temperament or intensity of feeling there is nothing said, we lose patience and attribute the silence to some wrong cause. We then easily lose touch with the gentle work of the Holy Spirit and finally leave the soul unhelped or even cast down into deeper despair.

God had humbled Job. It was not for Elihu to add to the humiliation in any way by this assumption that Job was full of scorn. It may be wondered if Elihu had actually been through such a trial of suffering himself at this stage. After a measure of growth, where we are able to discern spiritual things quickly, it is possible for the light we receive to outrun the experience. Our power then betrays itself at some critical moment.

Elihu then pours forth a torrent of words. He is wounded by this silence and loses his quiet self-restraint and begins to make charges as the others have done. It would be better to deliver the message we know we have received from God and then quietly go on our way. We do not need people to confess that the word spoken has met the need.

‘So shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth . . . It shall accomplish that which I please.’ says Isaiah (55:11)

Elihu has explained rightly the message of the interpreter or the ambassador; the one who knows how to commune with the King and is chosen of Him to convey His message.

Such interpreters, says Elihu, are one among a thousand. In other words they are rare because few are willing for the necessary training in the school of suffering which develops the servant to a more sensitive intuition to the mind of God. It creates a more delicate touch with the Spirit of God.

Elihu has shown Job what was right for him to do. He must cease to struggle under God’s hand and rest on His faithfulness, otherwise there was no hope of response or light from God upon this particular pathway.

Job’s friends had failed to interpret to Job correctly what God was doing.

However, Elihu had manifested the Spirit of God in all he said.

However, now he is as a man and not an interpreter. His lapse into self-consciousness has brought a dimness of spiritual vision.

He begins to speak as the other three and take up much the same argument. He also speaks of a great God, at length, and the only right attitude of humble acceptance before Him. But Elihu takes a very server tone and he ceases to speak with the deference and respect becoming his youth. He ends with the harsh words,

‘Does Job open his mouth in vain;
and multiply words without knowledge?’ (35:16)

This has already been said and in spite of all that he has spoken that has been right, he ends this part of his argument sounding very much like the three friends. It appears that Job has been wise to remain silent. Job's cause is still before God. Let him wait God's pleasure.

F) Speaks for God Again

'I have yet to speak on God's behalf . . .' (36:2)

There is a marked change in Elihu's speech at this point. He resumes his courteous deference. Had he suddenly realised he had been speaking on his own behalf? Or realised he was attacking Job in some way personally? It was not right at all to deal with all that he saw was wrong nor was it his place to apply the message of God.

The Lord could certainly use him so long as he retained his courtesy and love but he had been hurt and had thereby lost touch with the Spirit of God. Elihu is only a mouthpiece for God when the lips are yielded to Him for His use. He resumes a right attitude with the words, 'suffer me a little,' and the change in tone means that the hand of God is upon him again. He enlarges upon his first message to Job and begins to speak of the great heart of God.

The Lord is mighty yet He despises not any of the weakest of His children. He knows their frame and remembers that they are dust. In all their affliction, He is afflicted. Yet His strength of heart-love toward them enables Him to bear seeing them suffer for their eternal gain. He gives to the afflicted their right (36:6) after His purpose of love is accomplished. His words begin to be in accordance with new testament scripture where it tells us if we suffer with him we shall also be glorified with him. (5)

In His purposes of love, God has already given us victory and seated us at His right hand and made us kings and priests unto Him in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore, He is mighty in strength, patiently fitting us for our future position. The trials only prepare us for our high and heavenly calling and teach us to overcome just as He overcame.

Elihu explains the tenderness of God to open the ear of His servants in affliction and to gently show them where they are transgressing or moving without His commands. The servant of God is liable to behave proudly in criticism or in harsh judgement of others. He may rely on his own capabilities or be assured of his own knowledge or even in thinking himself indispensable to God.

Sin is being revealed in its true light.

Every transgression needs a return to God for His pardon and cleansing, as at the very first seeking of Him in our early days. It is the same, says Elihu, as free choice. If we hearken and elect to serve Him and follow His ways then we shall once again make our way prosperous. 'If they hearken not,' (v.12) the faithful God must use the sword in still sharper ways of dealing. We shall be saved as by fire but the life may be lost. It seems that Elihu can explain to Job that in all his affliction he is actually, although silently, being drawn out of his suffering and is being delivered.

'Who is a Teacher like unto Him?' (36:22)

He gently leads His children, instructs them and brings them into a broad place. He is, however, so great, we cannot know Him or understand Him as He is or was.

But Elihu's youthful wisdom is a forceful contribution concerning the greatness of God. In chapter 37 verse 7 he says that God seals up the hand of every man.

A British official in India established a system of finger-print identification when his attention was drawn to these words. In the greatness of God, Elihu states this seal of individuality on every man's hand that no two are alike.

This gives great dignity to this story of one man and thus to all humanity.

While Elihu is speaking a great storm gathers and the group on the ash-mound are wrapped in darkness with vivid flashes of lightning. Elihu responds with delight as it seems that God has come forth from His pavilion and His glorious voice is thundering marvellously. 'What terrible majesty,' he says, 'He is excellent in power;' as they watch the heavens.

'Hearken unto this, O Job, stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.'

'Men do therefore fear Him.' The storm of God seems a fitting end to Elihu's lengthy discourse. (chapter 37).

Would he have stopped otherwise?

V. Job's God

'Then the Lord answered Job, and said,

'who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?' (38:1)

Job had said to God, 'Call, and I will answer.' Now the Lord will take him at his word. Out of the whirlwind there comes a voice, the voice of God.

Was it a still small voice that Elijah heard after the might of the storm had subsided?

God had upon Him a terrible majesty, with a golden splendour seen in the north; very intense and bright. The wind passed and cleansed the skies, and a hush had

fallen. The little group had a glimpse of Him who dwells in light unapproachable, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Here He is at last.

‘The king Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise God.’ (1)

Job must have bowed before such a One. Did the friends hear anything? We only know that God spoke to His servant and made Himself known to him. In His inimitable patience He had been there all the time.

The whirlwind was around him and he was alone with his Beloved at last.

‘Who is this?’ demands Jehovah. Is this My servant that I called true, upright, blameless and godly? Job, know yourself.

Job has been lying upon the ash heap in dumb misery ever since his attempt at self-vindication. In his self-pity and self-absorption and deep anguish of spirit he has been unable to respond any further.

He has been too crushed to answer Elihu a word.

But the all-wise God knows that none can raise up a wounded spirit by any means. He alone can do that. He, therefore, speaks to the stricken Job and bids him gird up his loins like a man. No word of God is void of power so we may well believe that the needed strength was conveyed to Job and set him upon his feet.

He was being gently prepared by God to hearken to the marvellous revelation which the Lord Himself would give. The Lord dealt the same way with Ezekiel and also with Daniel. They were fallen with their faces toward the ground in dumb helplessness at the vision of The Man. They were not able to hear His voice until, with a word, the Spirit of God sets them upon their feet, strengthened to bear an interview with the Eternal God.

The Lord does not repeat to Job the message of deliverance through a ransom. The interpretation of God’s dealings with him has been given. It is not further teaching that Job needs. It is a direct interview with Him and such a revelation that will bring him into the dust. God is about to give Job a glimpse into His own heart and why he brought him into such a place of deep suffering.

In beauty of language that has no parallel, God outlines before him in brief and vivid word pictures, His mighty power in heaven and on earth, making His glory pass before the eyes of His servant just as he did to Moses.

The wisdom Job had stated was his, was quickly brought to nought by God’s first question;

‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’ (38:4)

If Job was not able to fathom the things of creation, how could he possibly understand the mystery of his own life, and, as a finite creature, fathom the dealings of God with him?

If Jehovah had shut up the mighty sea within the boundary of His will, and had supreme control over the swelling of Jordan, could He not also prescribe the boundary line for Job's sorrows. God could surely also say 'no further' to the rabble of evildoers who were beginning to overwhelm the whole gathering. If Jehovah could clothe the earth with light by the morning breaking could he not as rapidly speak a word and bring His servant out of darkness into the light of resurrection day?

If Job could not see the springs of the mighty ocean nor have access to the recesses of the deep; if he could not discern the shadows of death nor perceive the turning point between life and death, how could he understand the springs within his own being and know the recesses of his own heart? He had talked of drawing near to the land of the shadow of death but they had been words without knowledge. God alone could deal with the springs of life and control the gates of death.

Jehovah gently presses upon Job the folly of questioning the actions of such a God.

The words of the Lord in chapter thirty-eight show a little of the conflict in the unseen realms of heaven which has lasted for ages. The climax is shown in the book of Revelation when the war in heaven between Michael and his angels, and the Devil with his hosts of darkness, is disclosed. Here, the Lord is pointing out to Job the infinite resources available to Him to deal with any adversary Job might have. Does he, Job, know anything of the forces reserved by God, as a man of war, against that day of battle? God is better able to deal with the indictment against Job by his Adversary than Job will ever be able to.

Jehovah outlines the strength of nature that he controls. The same Lord would control all the forces around His servant, so that in the end his need should be satisfied and his life spring forth again in power.

It was certainly good that Job had been strengthened by the word of God before He spoke any more. The continuing and rapidly outlined pictures of such majestic themes might overwhelm a mortal man. None but God could summarise as he does in these last chapters, the forces at His command.

He outlines with masterly ease the instruments of nature with which He will fulfil His will. Let Job also think of the dumb animal creation world -

'I know their sorrows as they bring forth their young.' 39:3

'I care when they cry for food.' 38:41

'I rejoice when they roam in freedom.' 39:5

Did you, Job, have anything to do with the beauty of the peacock or the amazing flight and beauty of the ostrich?

He commands the eagle also and gives strength to the horse.

Who provides their need? Would God create them and then neglect them? The same creative hand made all life yet each differs in its manifestation, actions, movements and instincts, to fulfil the purposes of God.

‘Shall he that contends with the Almighty instruct Him?’

‘Where is your wisdom, O Job, compared with Mine? 40:2

The Lord waits for Job to answer Him. Job had said he was prepared to reason with God and his mouth would be full of arguments if only he could gain access to the throne. But what answer could he give now to a God whom he had so misjudged? What could he say to such a revelation of God’s power, His infinite wisdom and His sympathy with the work of His own hands? This was the Creator speaking to one part of His created beings.

Job replies to Jehovah’s challenge, that he can only put his hand to his mouth and confess that he is silenced.

‘I am vile, I will not answer . . .

I will proceed no further.’ 40:5

Job is silenced, it is true, but the Lord must have from him a more frank confession of repentance and a deeper turning from himself and the past than this.

VI. Job’s Confession

The omniscient Lord sees that Job had not yet ceased to cling to his integrity. He has confessed that he is of small account. He owned that he felt humbled and contemptibly mean before the majesty of God and that he ought not to have spoken as he had done. But the Lord knows that He must now deal more personally with Job. He had been reminded of God’s power and been silenced before the greatness of his God; now he must be reminded that none of the power he had over others had been his own.

He was to learn a deeper measure of his own helplessness.

If you can do any of these things I can do, says Jehovah, than I will admit you can also save yourself.

God’s question presses close to home. Job knows that all his power and prestige has been stripped from him. He is painfully aware that he can no more re-clothe himself with it, than he could ‘deck himself with the majesty and excellency of God’ 41:10. Even his self-vindication was completely useless. God is touching the quick, as it were. He is bringing His servant down very slowly to the vital point of despair. It is the place of emptiness and blessing.

One or two more picture lessons are available to God's hand. The first is Behemoth, an elephant or hippopotamus. It has a calm confidence without trembling. The instinct of its life tells him that the swelling waters will only carry him where he wants to go. The deep waters of the trial Job had been through appeared to swallow him up. Now . . . Did he not know that he could not sink? The Spirit of God had breathed life into him and the waters could only carry him nearer to God.

The second picture is another huge creature called Leviathan or a whale. Still more minutely does the Lord describe how this powerful creature could not be tamed by man. None could play with him, or draw near to him. Men are cast down by the sight of him. No weapon can touch him as he rushes through the deep sea.

'Upon earth there is not his like in fearlessness.' 41:33

Who then can stand before Jehovah?

'Who has first given unto Me, that I should repay him? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is Mine.' 41:11

This is the declaration of God to Job and is the conclusion of the whole matter. As sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, Jehovah is under no obligation to any creature. None can demand anything by right. On the contrary, they must acknowledge His claim. 'MINE' is written by Him on all things under the whole heaven.

Job bows to the claim of his Creator and cries 'I know that You can do everything.' (42:2)

He has believed it and said it but now he knows it.

He confesses his absolute ignorance and that he has uttered words he did not really understand. He owns that he has talked of things too wonderful for his mind to grasp. He sees now that he has not been willing to be thought ignorant before his friends. Much less was he willing to be taught by them. It was all bitterly true. He could take a low place before the Lord and bow before Him and worship Him when blow after blow falls on him but he could not take the low place before his friends. He could not allow them to treat him as an ignorant, presumptuous man, much less a hypocrite and a secret sinner as they had suggested.

Now Job understands Elihu's words about the Lord with-drawing His children from their work, to 'hide pride' from them. It will save them from greater sorrow in the world to come.

With humility and some shame, Job looks up to God and asks, 'Will He let him speak?' It appears that God answers Job with some of his own words but Job has not much now to say

'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You.' (42:5)

The dealings of God with Job are very marvellous and wonderful to us. It is as though Job is telling God just what He is waiting to hear. So lovely are His

servants to Him, that He longs for them to have complete understanding of His dealings with them. He, Himself, yearns for them to walk closer to Him --
'You shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done.'
He says this through Ezekiel (1)

Job knew that God had been with him in the days of old. He had called on God and was answered and was blessed. It had, however, been a 'hearing of the ear' now his inner ear is opened and the 'eyes of his understanding have been enlightened.' (2)

We could pause for a moment to consider the significance of the revelation of God to Job.

The book of Job is thought to be the oldest of the Bible books, older than the records of Genesis and the books of Moses. The Divine Spirit must have had a very special purpose in it's preservation. It contains the first, primary revelation of God to His creatures, to be followed by a gradual unveiling of Himself from there on.

To Job the Lord is revealed as the great First Cause, the central pivot and spring of all creation. The One Who directs and moves all things from the throne. To the redeemed of today the same God is revealed in His Son Jesus Christ who, as Paul wrote, is the 'image of the invisible God and in Him all things were created and in Him all things hold together.' (3)

The Lord Jesus is equal with God and is Creator as well as Redeemer. Job knows himself and his measure at last. He abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes. He has become the little child that Elihu describes. He is content at last to lie upon his Father's heart; to know all that He wishes him to know and no more; content to be what the Father wishes him to be and to rejoice in all the gifts and graces that others may possess.

It is quite significant that James tells us in the New Testament that stumbling not in word is the supreme mark of a man fully under the control of God.

The same man, says James, is able to bridle the whole body. James also refers to the patience of Job under great trial and has obviously studied the writings and history of this man.

He had Job in mind when he pressed home his call to count it joy when manifold trials come on us.

They will work all that is necessary to be perfect, lacking nothing.

He is also concerned that we remember the end of the Lord; that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy. (4)

V11. Job's Conclusions

It is important to remember that the special message of the book of Job is only applicable to those who have learnt to walk with God. It is only for those who have the fixed purpose of fellowship with him because of a conscience void of offence. If we do not recognise this we shall be thrown into hopeless confusion because it is only at a certain stage of growth in the spiritual life that suffering becomes a necessary part of God's training. He is intent upon conforming His children to the image of His Son. Those who are outside of Christ, or even those who profess to be religious, are not under the hand of God as Job was.

There needs to be some maturity in the Christian life before we can endure such chastening.

So it is not surprising we see the lessons of Job repeated throughout scripture. Jeremiah and Job are most alike in places as they pour out their grief in an hour of affliction. Both David and Job also are led through the same deep waters. Their language is almost the same although the circumstances are very different in Psalm 49 and Job 33.

There is a similar cry from Jonah going down into death in the sea monster. And Jonah's cry was specifically said by the Lord to represent His own passage by the cross and the grave to the right hand of God.

It is taught clearly all the way through the Old and New Testaments that the ripest and most mature are all led through the same pathway of suffering.

'God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.' Psalm 49

'Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him.' Job 13:18

'Out of the belly of hell, cried I, and You heard my voice . . . You have cast me into the deep, all Your waves and Your billows passed over me.' Jonah 2:2,3

'Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, that refuses to be healed?

Will You be altogether unto me as a liar and as waters that fail?' Jeremiah 15:18

Job had lost all. Stripped of all earthly substance; the removal of all his children, not just one; all his strength gone and left with incomparable weakness; his reputation and standing among men torn apart and trampled on; and all his service to God now non-existent; God had proved to the Adversary that mortal man could and would remain with fixed love and desire towards Himself. The attacks had only led him closer to his Lord.

The Lord had proved to the friends that a man could be justified before God and suffering was not invariably the result of sin.

And the Lord had proved to Job that the end of all His dealings with His children was always for their good.

His love and pity does not change one bit when they are placed in the fire.
It can be said that the Lord Himself is the refining fire.

‘Our God is a consuming fire.’ (1)

It must also be remembered that the judgement that is coming upon the world must begin with the house of God, that

‘We should not be condemned with the world.’ (2)

At the last, the three friends are commanded to offer up a burnt sacrifice and Job will pray for them.

Seven bullocks and seven rams were to be offered to God as a confession of sin and an acknowledgement that their guilt could only be atoned for by the shedding of blood. They were to humble themselves and go to Job that he might pray for them and thus admit that they had wronged him. The number seven indicates that things in the sight of God are full and complete.

The Lord had said nothing to Job of deliverance for himself. He seems surely to be more in need of prayer just then. God did say, however, that He would accept him as he prayed for his accusers.

So Job must put aside all thought of his present condition now and co-operate with the known will of God and that does not include thinking of himself!

He must not look for outward signs of deliverance from his own sorrows. He must cease from his own affairs and attend to the needs of his friends.

So he does not consider how hardly he is being dealt with and neither is he allowed to wonder whether his position will ever change. What a test of his inner spirit!

We must pray with real desire that those who had misjudged him so cruelly would be forgiven and blessed. And he must do it while he is left, apparently undelivered, outside the village, still on the ashes. Job prayed as the Lord Jesus prayed in the midst of suffering for those who crucified Him.

Nothing is said of the way Job is delivered.

Possibly it is of little significance in God’s eyes. The Lord was looking on the heart. It is sufficient to know that the turning point came when Job entirely ceased from himself. When we give ourselves to the ministry of others, caring nothing for ourselves at all, then we can safely leave ourselves in God’s hands and can rest completely content with His will.

Job received from the hand of God more than He had taken away. Double is a hard thing to receive. In the statutes given to Israel it was the right of the eldest son but Elijah tells Elisha he has asked a hard thing by asking for a double portion of his spirit. The mantle that fell from the master’s shoulders as he went out of sight into heaven typified the outpouring of the Spirit that fell upon the waiting disciples at

Jerusalem. So that the double portion of the fulness of the Spirit is the right of the child of God. The hard thing is for the flesh to be broken enough to receive it. Job's path, to be broken enough for the reception of double, had been hard indeed. He had been broken on every side and it had cost him much. Stripped of all that had once given him authority of power, he can now take a place of intercession on behalf of others, with God, while he is still outwardly a stricken man.

Job's reasonings, however, were altogether sound. It must not be thought otherwise. He would know that sin, especially sin or rebellion in a leader of other men, demands a response from God.

1. It may easily result in death;
2. The servant of God could be set aside
and not heard of again, or
3. Restoration may occur as in Jonah's case.

So that refuting an accusation of sin is important and with the possibility of sin, the higher the repute of the leader, the greater his responsibility and the penalties more noted.

'To whom much is given,' said Jesus, 'much is required.' (3)

Job knew his position in life and recognised his standing before God. Therefore, in a sense, for his friend's sake, as well as his own, he must argue with God. But, he says, if you can prove me wrong, I would stop defending myself and die. Job's arguments, however, are more Godward than friend-conscious. He is desperately, at times, seeking to hear from his true Friend, the One who could set it all right with a word.

As a leader of men, he would have already borne the doubts and fears of others; he would know the tears and the pains and the loneliness or caring for others, and countered this.

Nevertheless, all intellectualism, humanitarianism, scientific reasoning and counterfeit-everything must come to an end. He must stand on faith in God alone. Greatly concerned with spiritual death and separation from his Beloved Companion while life remained, his suffering would be all the more acute.

So the story of Job comes with fresh emphasis to the children of God in these days when the enemy is coming in like a flood. We need not be occupied with watching for the Adversary but we do need to remember that we are given power over all the power of the enemy through Christ. We can look beyond the second causes, whether they are satanic or human and look to Him who sits on the throne. We abide in Him and can leave to Him the stilling of the enemy and the avenger.

'What is man that You are mindful of him? . . . You have made him a little lower than the angels and have crowned him with glory and honour. You made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; You have put all things under his feet; . . .

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Your Name in all the earth. Psalm 8

V111. A Hymn, A Command, a Prayer

A Hymn -

In hopelessness, I look in hope to Thee;
In lovelessness, Lord, send Thy love to me;
In poverty and pain and none to care,
With tender mercy - Thou wilt hear my prayer.

In suffering, O my God, Thy cross alone
Will heal a broken heart and sin atone.
I cannot fear the depths of misery;
Though deeper still - I still will be with Thee. Anon

A Command -

'Call unto Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things,
which you know not.'

Prayer --

'Father, I am Yours. You are the Instigator and the Sustainer of my faith. Do
with me as you will. Let there be nothing left in me that murmurs at the dealings
You see are needed in my life. Bring me to that place where Your word tells me,
perfect love casts out fear and all that You do brings forth nothing from me but
spontaneous worship.'

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