

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.

Eighth Week - First Day

JOB TAUGHT OF GOD

"Moreover Yahweh answered Job and said: 'Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.' Then Job answered Yahweh and said: 'Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.' Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 'Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?' . . . Then Job answered Yahweh and said: 'I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. . . . Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' . . . Now Yahweh blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (Job 40:1-8; 42:1-2, 6, 12).

The controversy in which the Lord himself is now represented as taking part, as the judge to whom Job had so often appealed, comes to a point at the beginning of the fortieth chapter, which the reader will note with special interest.

The Lord *has* spoken. His first objective was to bring Job into a proper state of mind by beating down the boldness and presumption that he had repeatedly evinced in speaking of the divine dealings with mankind, and with himself in particular. This is done by showing Job, from many examples drawn from the visible creation, his utter incompetence to judge the ways of God.

The argument, as we have already stated it, is as follows: Since God has shown forth in the visible works of creation a power and wisdom surpassing man's comprehension, He is therefore entitled to claim implicit trust in His moral government of the world; thus it is incumbent upon man to recognize that God does and must do all things wisely, justly, and well. Although man may not immediately (or ever) comprehend all that God does, his proper feeling is nevertheless to be one of implicit trust.

At this place the Lord seems to pause, as if affording Job the opportunity of pleading his own cause before the Almighty, which he had so earnestly desired. But Job can now see that in this matter he had heinously offended and rendered himself obnoxious to the divine displeasure; in the midst of his great trial he had sinned. And this conviction had its proper effect. His

habitually conscientious and reverent mind was shocked, and his heart was now thoroughly humbled. This kept him silent.

But an answer was expected, even demanded: "*Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.*" Job must reply; but his answer is that of one who is smitten in his heart, shaken where before he deemed himself most secure: "*Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.*" It is astonishing that in the face of this plain confession and deep contrition, and of the fact that the Lord's address is mainly intended for his conviction, that many have insisted that Job's part in the controversy has been all but perfect and blameless!

Job himself, however, knew better. In his endeavor to vindicate himself, he confesses that he had spoken of God in an irreverent and improper manner, and declares he will not repeat what he said or attempt any further vindication of himself. Job felt in his very heart that the Lord was right, that he had often indulged in a most unbecoming spirit towards him, and that the only acceptable and proper response now was a humble and penitent acknowledgment in the fewest possible words. "Behold, I am vile," were the best that could be chosen under the circumstances. They were ample and all-sufficient. Remorse is never wordy. And the real penitence of anyone is open to suspicion if he finds it needful to say much more than what can be said in the fewest words. Let us keep in our own hearts those simple yet moving words, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

The Lord now resumes the argument. However, the discourse is not conducted so as to explain or remove the difficulties under which Job and his friends labored, but its purpose is to overpower them by the divine sovereignty and prerogative. Job is not informed why the wicked are often allowed to live prosperously in this world while the righteous are often overwhelmed with afflictions. He does not show how the sufferings of the upright are consistent with his approval of their conduct. Far less does He anywhere refer to the retributions of the world to come. He does not say that the inequalities of this life will all be adjusted there; that the wicked, however much they have prospered here, will there meet their just doom; or that the righteous, however much they may have suffered here, shall there find abundant compensation for all their trials.

Most of us might have anticipated that this would have been the line of argument taken, since it is the one which we today would have likely taken under similar circumstances. But a little reflection will suffice to show that nothing like this was to be expected. It would have been too far in advance of the knowledge the world then possessed, and it would have been an untimely anticipation of the great and consoling truths that were reserved for Christ to open when He became man.

God's teaching had been from the first progressive. While men were yet in the infancy of sacred knowledge, God saw that it was not suitable to set before them the high matters reserved

for their manhood. God has in all time fed his children with milk and given his strong meat to men of full age. The question is not what He can do, but what He has seen best to do. He could doubtless have imparted the fullest knowledge at first. He could have ordained that every plant should at once yield forth its seed without the slow process of bud, blossom, then fruit. He could have decreed that man should be born in maturity of strength and intellect, instead of first passing through many years of immaturity and weakness. And He could have sent his well-beloved Son into the world and poured down the Pentecostal Spirit as easily in the time of Abraham, David, Hezekiah, or Daniel, as in that of Tiberius Caesar.

It suffices that He has not done so; that He has seen fit to make all things progressive. It was so also with religious truth, until Christ came to set his seal--the seal of his blood--to all that patriarchs had hoped, all that priests had shadowed forth, and all that prophets had uttered. This is not a speculation but a fact; and we ought to be satisfied with it. If we are not, we sin as Job sinned; and seeing that our light is greater than his, we lay ourselves open to more severe rebuke.

Job's experience affords us much comfort under severe trial and affliction. We see clearly that the Lord has a right to reign over us, and that we are bound to a cheerful submission to his dispensations--not because we see the reasons for them, but because we recognize they are his will and meant for our essential good. These are proper grounds of argument when affliction arises, and sometimes amount to nearly all that can be urged.