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Messianic Mountaintops

by

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IX. JOB

No record in any literature of the world gives us as much and as detailed information of the past as the Bible. Yet the Bible is not written to relate world history. It is written to show us God's plan of salvation for mankind. All the events reported in the singular record of the Scriptures have Christocentric impact. For the student to whom the Scriptures have absolute authority for doctrine and life, every individual appearing on the scene has some connection with the history of salvation, with the Messianic message. For example, Abraham is portrayed as hero of faith not for Abraham's sake only or his descendants. Abraham is the father of all believers, the man chosen from the mass of men to be the founder of the nation of God and to be the ancestor of the Messiah. Another example: When Melchizedek, the king of Salem, appears unexpectedly on the scene and is introduced to us as a priest of the Most High God, we realize that there were other believers on the earth besides Abraham. He is particularly important because of his relationship to Abraham and thus to the coming Son and Seed of Abraham. As such Melchizedek serves as a type of the coming Priest-King.

Children of God were active in other places too—pious people not of the family of Abraham. One of them, probably from Edom, was Job. He is given highest praise by God Himself as a man standing like a monument of piety in his time and country. He may have lived at the time of the patriarchs. Neither when he lived nor who wrote this masterpiece of the book of Job—it may have been Solomon—is of importance. His importance is based not only on his personal story of suffering and faith, but especially on the part he played in God's plan of salvation. We get an indication of his importance when we see him linked directly with the Savior in James 5:11: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." In one breath James mentions Job and Christ. We do not think that the statement about the end of the Lord means to say that the readers are familiar with the conclusion to the story of Job; rather the sufferings of Job and of Christ are placed side by side. Job is in great company.

Though one of the greatest works in history, the book of Job has been a puzzle to many. What is the real meaning of the book of Job? Is it primarily an example of great dramatic art? Is it a theodicy, a defense of a God who permits the righteous to suffer? Has it any solution to the questions asked by sufferers of all times. Most interpreters will admit that the book ends without giving a real answer. The problem of suffering is much discussed by the friends of Job, but their solution is too easy. They say implicitly and explicitly that Job must be guilty somewhere and somehow that God should so punish him.

There are some interpreters who seem to have the right answer to the mystery of the book. Wilhelm Vischer and Helmut Lamparter, e.g., see Job as a witness to Christ. In what way? Lamparter

calls attention to the fact that the real debate is between God and Satan. Satan has raised the question: "Does Job serve God for naught," for nothing? Satan implies that, after all, Job knows what side his bread is buttered on. "Take away all that he has," Satan cynically sneers, "and he'll curse you to your face." So then, this pious, God-fearing man is made to suffer.

As Job's life unfolds, we discover that he is not, as frequently pictured, the "patient Job," but rather the "steadfast Job." He is not a pure saint. He is a sinner like all the rest of us. We note that he does not let God go out of his life, nor does he curse Him. Rather, he cries his heart out to Him with words that are so like that cry of the other Servant of God: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He seems to get no answer; he seems to beat in vain at the portals of heaven and finally stands before the very gate of death. But, lo and behold, surprise of surprises! From out of the deepest and darkest valley of the shadow of death he looks up and breaks forth with the well known and glorious "I know that my Redeemer lives!"

However, we must not rush to the conclusion that Job is an immaculate servant of God, a perfect example to show that if we try hard enough, we can succeed in becoming righteous before God in our own right—at least partially. Job would be the first to admit that he has failed again and again, even as we and all others have failed and shall continue to fail. When Job sees God's glory he confesses, "I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Is there, then, anywhere one who can and does keep God's law without a single miss and, in addition, suffers quite innocently as a substitute for all mankind? Job says yes. And Job knows who He is. It is none other than Jesus Christ. He is the world's Redeemer. The puzzle presented by the open end, as the drama critics put it, of the Job drama is solved, yes. How? When the conflict between God and Satan for the soul of man is won by Jesus Christ.

Job reaches the pinnacle of his faith when he cries "out of the depths" (Job 19:23-27):

Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

For twenty-two verses of chapter 19 Job cries, protests, complains bitterly of what has befallen him. No one can hear him without knowing that he is as low in spirit as he has ever been. This is his darkest hour. He feels that God and man are arrayed against him. He pleads: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me!"

But suddenly what a surprise from Job! Though close to despair, he turns to a hope that is to him an answer. He resolves to speak

words that should never be forgotten. Remember, he does not know that in a little while he will again enjoy peace and prosperity here on earth. Nothing could be farther from his mind. That is why he sees only the grave and the worms that will finally be his only companions.

We ask, Why, then, this kind of introduction to what he wants to say? Job does something which Balaam, Jacob, and David also did. We recall Balaam's solemn preface to his Messianic prophecy, also Jacob's, who sees the future as he faces death, also David's, who, as we saw, formally and officially states who he is and what he is saying in his last will and testament is God's Word. It may be that the very expectance of death gives Job an insight into the future beyond the grave. Since Job believed that his words had Messianic import, we do not speculate when we think that God gave him this light in his darkest hour.

That this light and hope is of great significance to him he expresses by wishing out loud: "Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!" These words were certainly heard by God; and God, who hears prayers and wishes and fulfills them often far beyond what we hope or understand, certainly granted this wish. These words *were* written in a book, in The Book, or we should not know them. "Oh, that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever!" Again, Job is not thinking of a memorial to himself. He does not want his name engraved in a rock. He wants his words to be recorded indelibly; so important they are. And what happens? Wherever there are Christian cemeteries, wherever believers set up headstones and memorials to the departed, we will often find either the words or simply the passage engraved in rock. Only one passage is used more often than Job 19:25, and that one is John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life." Yes indeed, Job's words are literally carved on stone tablets. Often the letters cut into stone are lined with metal to make the words more permanent and easier to read. Many stones cry out the words of Job.

Now, what is this fact that Job wants recorded for all time? Answer: "For I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Job's simple confession has been subjected to cruel criticism by some Bible interpreters—and martyred. However, these words present no real difficulty. The following ones do, probably caused by Job's abrupt and ecstatic way of speaking as we find it in other prophetic oracles and, by the way, practiced by poets great and small, in our own English literature even today. But this statement consists of simple Hebrew words: "For I, I know." In the same manner Christ's "I AM" statements can be translated "I, I AM." This is a very personal statement. Job says, "No matter what you think, no matter what has happened to me, no matter that I am only skin and bones (verse 20), I know something. I know it with conviction." The word "know" in the Old Testament as well as in the New takes on a much greater sense than cognitive knowledge; it is an intimate and inner conviction.

What is Job's knowledge and inner conviction? "My Redeemer

lives." This word *goel* occurs about fifty times in the Old Testament, the verb "redeem" about as many times. The concept is that of a next of kin, a brother, that is responsible for me when I cannot act in my own behalf. He is the one who avenges me when I am gone. He is the one who must buy me from bondage. He is my substitute. He helps me out of my trouble. Jacob says: "The angel that redeemed me." Isaiah 59:20: "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion." Job speaks of *his* Redeemer. He insists that he has **One** who will be on his side against all enemies. More, he has the conviction that this Redeemer *lives*. The Redeemer is a real, living, existing helper. How strongly *lives* can be emphasized can be deduced from the subsequent talk of his friend's conquest of death.

The four Hebrew words say too much for those who measure the dimensions of faith with their evolution-of-religion yardstick. That Job believes he has a Redeemer, even in death, is to them inconceivable. Rejecting the evolutionistic approach—that is, an ever evolving, never fixed character of recorded Biblical truth, which must necessarily force one into the position of accepting nothing as eternally true—this writer believes that what is said in Job here speaks of the Lord in whom Job trusts and that by the Spirit of God Job has been given this knowledge. Job's words that move forward from death and the grave show that Job is inspired.

We need not ask the source or the psychological process by which this light came to this sufferer. It came to him as truth came to Jacob, or David, or any of the holy men of God that spake "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." It is not wishful thinking or a vain hope that Job expresses, for why would someone want his speculations memorialized and set into monuments! Job believes in God, though he does not understand what happens to him. Job had offered many sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins to God and he certainly believed that God forgave in mercy. Job shows in all his talks that he is no superficial dreamer or religious philosopher. The depth of his theology and insight into God's will and ways is probably greater than we know. As a man in a deep pit can see a star above him, so Job sees the light that gave hope even to Job's first parents.

Not to be overlooked in this connection is that it would be in keeping with the history of oral tradition if Job, who lived in patriarchal times, knew of the promise of God given to Adam and Eve after the fall, or of other revelations passed on by word of mouth. The human race, caught in the inexorable cycle of life and death, cannot help looking for something or someone to break the inexorable round. Therefore we find a sort of messianic tendency in mythologies and the religions of nations, ancient and modern. People were always ready to listen to men who asserted of themselves that they were redeemers. The promise that the right man would come and right the universe found ready ears. In Job's case, however, it is not mere wishful thinking when he says (14:13-17):

Oh that thou wouldest hide me in
 Sheol,
 that thou wouldest conceal me
 until thy wrath be past,
 that thou wouldest appoint me a
 set time, and remember me!
 If a man die, shall he live again?
 All the days of my service I would
 wait,
 till my release should come.
 Thou wouldest call, and I would
 answer thee;
 thou wouldest long for the work of
 thy hands.
 For then thou wouldest number my
 steps,
 thou wouldest not keep watch over
 my sin;
 my transgression would be sealed up
 in a bag,
 and thou wouldest cover over my
 iniquity.

This thought, so close to the reality of God's plan for man, is also at the basis of a second prayer. We hear Job say:

O earth, cover not my blood,
 and let my cry find no resting place.
 Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
 and he that vouches for me is on high.
 My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God,
 that He would maintain the right of a man with God,
 like that of a man with his neighbor.

Franz Delitzsch calls these two passages and the one we are considering "three pearls of which the third is most precious." He compares this passage to Isaiah 53 which is, naturally and spiritually speaking, both the center and climactic highpoint of Isaiah's prophecies.

Job's unparalleled confession is, first of all, his confident assertion that both the wrong done to him by his accusing and unjust "friends" and the terrible hurts inflicted on him by his "archenemy" will be avenged. That he knows it is not God who punishes him and destroys him "without cause" is evident from his appeals to God. He knows he has a real, living Redeemer. He describes the Redeemer as "standing as the last One over the dust." The word *dust*, as used here, can hardly be equated with the world as a whole. It can, of course, be included. Even in 17:16 this dust is the grave or that dust to which man returns. This idea of dust as a metaphor for death is the more plausible since Job speaks of the Redeemer that lives. The dying sinner can be comforted only by a living Redeemer. The word *latter* used in some translations means *future*, as the word is used in 18:20,

“future generations.” A modern Jewish commentator, Tur Sinai, translates this: “they that come after him.” The same scholar translates verse 25: “He that comes later.” The sense is that of a future One who will stand over Job’s dust or grave.

The next statement should have never caused exegetes and translators as much trouble as it has. If one simply adheres to the words and forgets all the rationalized prejudices against any statement speaking of the resurrection of the body as an assured fact, he can read: “hereafter will this be surrounded with my skin.” Says M. Moeller in *Sinn und Aufbau des Buches Hiob* (page 49): “This is the simplest and smoothest translation of this text.” The word *surround* is found in some translations. Here the Hebrew word has that meaning in several uses of the verb. The statement, “surrounded with the flesh,” afflicted unto death, is followed by a parallel sentence that emphasizes the concept of restoration of the flesh: “and out of my flesh shall I see God.”

The RSV at first gave precedence to “without” my flesh, but in later editions restored it to “out of” my flesh. The Hebrew preposition is used in various ways, but the first meaning is the local. “From out of my flesh” means: being in my body I shall see God. The ideas of resurrection and of life everlasting are joined in a very natural way. That this is a personal seeing is strongly stressed by Job in continuing: “Whom I, I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold Him, and not a stranger.” He could hardly say it more emphatically. He is going to see his Redeemer with his own eyes, clad in his own flesh, and not some stranger, so that no one might mistake his hope of the Redeemer to be a vague hope that someday someone might stand at his graveside and hear or see Job justified against the accusation of his enemies.

Now, what is this seeing of God? It cannot be, as some suggest, that he hopes for a day on this side of the grave when Job shall have the satisfaction of seeing God’s hand with him. Job expected to die. Just look at 16:18-22 or 17:1 and 16. The grave is ready for him, this he knows. But he does not know God’s ultimate plan for him here on earth. He has not heard God’s contract clause to Satan: “only spare his life!” Nor does Job expect to see God after his death only as a disembodied soul. That he does not mean this is clear from what he has just said about his seeing his Redeemer with his own eyes and in his own body. Nor do the Old Testament Scriptures teach a permanent separation of body and soul. The intent of his wish that his words should be written down is that what he will see and know of his Redeemer will occur after his death, not before. A *goel*, redeemer, usually acts for one that has died or has been murdered.

It must be that he is thinking of the resurrection of the body. To be sure, Job has spoken of the certainty and finality of death. We, too, know that there is no return to this life and existence in the fallen world. The resurrection is a resurrection to eternal life. Job hopes to see God his Redeemer personally after his body has been raised from the dead. This hope is his light, and this hope makes him long for the moment with a burning desire, which Job expresses in the He-

brew way of thinking: "My kidneys are consumed in my bosom." The RSV says: "My heart faints within me." The heart does not faint and the kidneys are not consumed in a literal sense. We say my heart goes out to someone, or my heart burns with love or longing. Job is sick of this life; he has wished himself dead, but not now, not in the way that his wife suggested to him. Job has a desire to depart and to be with God. He has nothing on this earth that would hold him. He still has his God. The Name of the Lord is still to him the best and greatest. This Lord he wants to see with a longing greater than any earthly desire.

Not the how and why and where of redemption from sin and death are the great facts of Job's comfort, but the truth of God as Redeemer—that is the comfort of believers of all times and ages. Near the point of deepest despair God gives Job a great light of hope. Job, who could not redeem himself or defend himself against accusations of man or God or devil, still knows in whom he believes.

In the fullness of time He came—the One who served God "for naught," who lived, suffered, and died out of pure and perfect love of God, making propitiation for the world's sins, for Job's sins and for ours. Jesus Christ is the Servant of God who fulfilled the will of God as our substitute and who will keep His promise to Job and to us: "I will raise him!"