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COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE

Job

by Matthew Henry

To the Students of the Words, Works and Ways of God:

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AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, OF

THE BOOK OF

JOB

This book of Job stands by itself, is not connected with any other, and is therefore to be considered alone. Many copies of the Hebrew Bible place it after the book of Psalms, and some after the Proverbs, which perhaps has given occasion to some learned men to imagine it to have been written by Isaiah or some of the later prophets. But, as the subject appears to have been much more ancient, so we have no reason to think but that the composition of the book was, and that therefore it is most fitly placed first in this collection of divine morals: also, being doctrinal, it is proper to precede and introduce the book of Psalms, which is devotional, and the book of Proverbs, which is practical; for how shall we worship or obey a God whom we know not? As to this book,

I. We are sure that it is given by inspiration of God, though we are not certain who was the penman of it. The Jews, though no friends to Job, because he was a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, yet, as faithful conservators of *the oracles of God* committed to them, always retained this book in their sacred canon. The history is referred to by one apostle (~~341B~~ James 5:11) and one passage (~~345B~~ James 5:13) is quoted by another apostle, with the usual form of quoting scripture, *It is written,* ~~449B~~ 1 Corinthians 3:19. It is the opinion of many of the ancients that this history was written by Moses himself in Midian, and delivered to his suffering brethren in Egypt, for their support and comfort under their burdens, and the encouragement of their hope that God would in due time deliver and enrich them, as he did this patient sufferer. Some conjecture that it was written originally in Arabic, and afterwards translated into Hebrew, for the use of the Jewish church, by Solomon (so Monsieur Jurieu) or some other inspired writer. It seems most probable to me that Elihu was the penman of it, at least of the discourses, because (~~482B~~ Job 32:15, 16) he mingles the words of a historian with those of a disputant: but Moses perhaps wrote the first two chapters and the last, to give light to the discourses; for in

them God is frequently called *Jehovah*, but not once in all the discourses, except ^{<829>}Job 12:9. That name was but little known to the patriarchs before Moses, ^{<168>}Exodus 6:3. If Job wrote it himself, some of the Jewish writers themselves own him a *prophet among the Gentiles*; if Elihu, we find he had a spirit of prophecy which *filled him with matter and constrained him*, ^{<828>}Job 32:18.

II. We are sure that it is, for the substance of it, a true history, and not a romance, though the dialogues are poetical. No doubt there was such a man as Job; the prophet Ezekiel names him with Noah and Daniel, ^{<344>}Ezekiel 14:14. The narrative we have here of his prosperity and piety, his strange afflictions and exemplary patience, the substance of his conferences with his friends, and God's discourse with him out of the whirlwind, with his return at length to a very prosperous condition, no doubt is exactly true, though the inspired penman is allowed the usual liberty of putting the matter of which Job and his friends discoursed into his own words.

III. We are sure that it is very ancient, though we cannot fix the precise time either when Job lived or when the book was written. So many, so evident, are its hoary hairs, the marks of its antiquity, that we have reason to think it of equal date with the book of Genesis itself, and that holy Job was contemporary with Isaac and Jacob; though not coheir with them of the promise of the earthly Canaan, yet a joint-expectant with them of the *better country*, that is, *the heavenly*. Probably he was of the posterity of Nahor, Abraham's brother, whose first-born was *Uz* (^{<122>}Genesis 22:21), and in whose family religion was for some ages kept up, as appears, ^{<135>}Genesis 31:53, where God is called, not only *the God of Abraham*, but *the God of Nahor*. He lived before the age of man was shortened to seventy or eighty, as it was in Moses's time, before sacrifices were confined to one altar, before the general apostasy of the nations from the knowledge and worship of the true God, and while yet there was no other idolatry known than the worship of the sun and moon, and that punished by the Judges, Judges 31:26-28. He lived while God was known by the name of *God Almighty* more than by the name of *Jehovah*; for he is called *Shaddai — the Almighty*, above thirty times in this book. He lived while divine knowledge was conveyed, not by writing, but by tradition; for to that appeals are here made, ^{<888>}Job 8:8; 21:29; 15:18; 5:1. And we have therefore reason to think that he lived before Moses, because here is no

mention at all of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, or the giving of the law. There is indeed one passage which might be made to allude to the drowning of Pharaoh (~~187D~~ Job 26:12): *He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through Rahab*, which name Egypt is frequently called by in scripture, as ~~18704~~ Psalm 87:4; 89:10; ~~2519~~ Isaiah 51:9. But that may as well refer to the proud waves of the sea. We conclude therefore that we are here got back to the patriarchal age, and, besides its authority, we receive this book with veneration for its antiquity.

IV. We are sure that it is of great use to the church, and to every good Christian, though there are many passages in it dark and hard to be understood. We cannot perhaps be confident of the true meaning of every Arabic word and phrase we meet with in it. It is a book that finds a great deal of work for the critics; but enough is plain to make the whole profitable, and it was all written for our learning.

1. This noble poem presents to us, in very clear and lively characters, these five things among others: —

(1.) *A monument of primitive theology.* The first and great principles of the light of nature, on which natural religion is founded, are here, in a warm, and long, and learned dispute, not only taken for granted on all sides and not the least doubt made of them, but by common consent plainly laid down as eternal truths, illustrated and urged as affecting commanding truths. Were ever the being of God, his glorious attributes and perfections, his unsearchable wisdom, his irresistible power, his inconceivable glory, his inflexible justice, and his incontestable sovereignty, discoursed of with more clearness, fulness, reverence, and divine eloquence, than in this book? The creation of the world, and the government of it, are here admirably described, not as matters of nice speculation, but as laying most powerful obligations upon us to fear and serve, to submit to and trust in, our Creator, owner, Lord, and ruler. Moral good and evil, virtue and vice, were never drawn more to the life (the beauty of the one and the deformity of the other) than in this book; nor the inviolable rule of God's judgment more plainly laid down, That *happy are the righteous, it shall be well with them;* and *Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with them.* These are not questions of the schools to keep the learned world in action, nor engines of state to keep the unlearned world in awe; no, it appears by this book that they are sacred truths of undoubted certainty, and which all the wise and sober part of mankind have in every age subscribed and submitted to.

(2.) It presents us with *a specimen of Gentile piety*. This great saint descended probably not from Abraham, but Nahor; or, if from Abraham, not from Isaac, but from one of the sons of the concubines that were sent into the east-country (^{GEN}Genesis 25:6); or, if from Isaac, yet not from Jacob, but Esau; so that he was out of the pale of the covenant of peculiarity, no Israelite, no proselyte, and yet none like him for religion, nor such a favourite of heaven upon this earth. It was a truth therefore, before St. Peter perceived it, that *in every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him*, ^{ACTS}Acts 10:35. There were *children of God scattered abroad* (^{JOH}John 11:52) besides the incorporated *children of the kingdom*, ^{MAT}Matthew 8:11, 12.

(3.) It presents us with *an exposition of the book of Providence*, and a clear and satisfactory solution of many of the difficult and obscure passages of it. The prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous have always been reckoned two as hard chapters as any in that book; but they are here expounded, and reconciled with the divine wisdom, purity, and goodness, by the *end of these things*.

(4.) It presents us with *a great example of patience* and close adherence to God in the midst of the sorest calamities. Sir Richard Blackmore's most ingenious pen, in his excellent preface to his paraphrase on this book, makes Job a hero proper for an epic poem; for, says he, "He appears brave in distress and valiant in affliction, maintains his virtue, and with that his character, under the most exasperating provocations that the malice of hell could invent, and thereby gives a most noble example of passive fortitude, a character no way inferior to that of the active hero," etc.

(5.) It presents us with *an illustrious type of Christ*, the particulars of which we shall endeavour to take notice of as we go along. In general, Job was a great sufferer, was emptied and humbled, but in order to his greater glory. So Christ abased himself, that we might be exalted. The learned bishop Patrick quotes St. Jerome ore than once speaking of Job as a type of Christ, who *for the job that was set before him endured the cross*, who was persecuted, for a time, by men and devils, and seemed forsaken of God too, but was raised to be an intercessor even for his friends and had added affliction to his misery. When the apostle speaks of the *patience of Job* he immediately takes notice of *the end of the Lord*, that is, of the Lord Jesus (as some understand it), typified by Job, ^{JAM}James 5:11.

2. In this book we have,

(1.) The history of Job's sufferings, and his patience under them (Job 1, 2, not without a mixture of human frailty, Job 3.

(2.) A dispute between him and his friends upon them, in which,

[1.] The opponents were Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.

[2.] The respondent was Job.

[3.] The moderators were, *First*, Elihu, Job 32-37. *Secondly*, God himself, Job 38-41.

(3.) The issue of all in Job's honour and prosperity, Job 42. Upon the whole, we learn that *many are the afflictions of the righteous, but that when the Lord delivers them out of them all the trial of their faith will be found to praise, and honour, and glory.*