


## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITINGS OF JOB

This is a genuine ABC production  authored by *Bob Coffey* and may not be reproduced or transmitted in any manner for financial profit

### A TELLING THESIS

Let me open with a few quotes from G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton speaks of “the loneliness of God” *even in scripture*. “All the patriarchs and prophets are merely his tools or weapons-Joshua is His axe and Moses His measuring rod.” “The saints of Christianity are supposed to be like God, to be, as it were, little statuettes of Him.” “Not merely is God stronger or more secret than man, but He means more, He knows better what He is doing and compared with Him we have something of the vagueness, the unreason, and the vagrancy of the beasts that perish.”

“The book of Job asks ‘but what is the purpose of God?’

(1) “The first intellectual beauty of the Book of Job is that it is concerned with the desire to know the actuality. Job is an optimist; he is outraged and insulted optimist. He wishes the universe to justify itself. He demands an explanation from God in the way a wife might demand an explanation from her husband whom she really respects.”

“He shakes the pillars of the world and lashes the stars, but not to silence them; it is to make them speak.”

(2) “**At the end of the poem God enters.** A more trivial poet would have made God enter to answer questions. When God enters it is to ask questions (I have counted 70 in all). THE EVERLASTING adopts an enormous (*and sardonic?*) humility. (i)**He asks the right to cross-examine.** Taken with that Job feels the terrible tingling atmosphere of something too good to be told – (ii) **the refusal of God to explain His design hints his design** and the riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man...these two facts make the book religious not philosophical.

(3) Third “there occurs the still deeper and finer inversion ...God knocks down pessimists and the mechanical optimist (Elihu) who says the universe can all be explained. God unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich and the crocodile. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of wonder.”

(4) “Job puts forward a note of interrogation. God answers with a note of exclamation. God insists it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was. Without once relaxing the rigid impenetrability of Jehovah **he** (*the poet- for the Christian the Spirit of God who inspired!*) has let light be seen for an instant through the cracks of a closed door. For example (i) Jehovah asks Job where he was when the foundations of the world were laid and then (as if fixing a date) mentions the time when the sons of God shouted for joy (*\*They had something to shout about*). Or (ii) again when God is speaking of snot and hail He speaks of them as a treasury that He has laid up against the day of battle - a hint of some huge Armageddon in which evil shall be at last overthrown.”

(5) “I doubt whether even scholars know if the Book of Job had any effect upon the after development of Jewish thought. **In the book the question is asked if God invariably punished vice with terrestrial punishment and rewards virtue with terrestrial prosperity.** If the Jews had answered the question wrong they might have lost all their influence on history and sunk down to the level even of well educated modern society...which makes *successful men good* as in **modern commerce and journalism.** If the Jews could be saved from this the Book of Job saved them. I need not say that there is one Old Testament figure that is truly a type; or say what is prefigured in the wounds of Job.”

## A VITAL CRITIQUE

The Book of Job is about “Redemption” as well as suffering. It is about salvation as well as suffering. It is about Christ as well as Job.

To work through the Book in its ancient Hebrew is a painstaking task. There are over 100 effete words from ancient time which happily are root derivatives of known terms. Up to a quarter of the text of the LXX equivalent is missing so it is of little help in exploring Job.

The Book has a plan under the Spirit of God. In “the legend of the book” I set out that plan and in the “broad brush overview” I detail how the arguments are drawn up and deal with the unfolding story in respect of its spiritual social, international and age-long applications. The down-to-earth theology of this book is intertwined with its heart-rending suffering.

The hugely interesting analysis of Chesterton is in so many ways deeply to be admired as literary appreciation. His valued comment that **the Jewish people may have learned from Job that success does not make people good** needs to be the handmaid of bible truth that sinful man can be justified and converted and within that relationship to God goodness that is from God and commendable in His sight grows even in the swamps of sin and the heat of suffering. One must be sensitive to the fact that Job was a very great man and that he lived in an oral culture where great feats of memory preserved such debates as the book enshrines in poetry. Whether a scribe recorded the exchanges on papyrus and later it was committed to the poetic epic which is rendered in Hebrew and may have been in Aramaic we do not know for sure but some such process occurred to set the book in its present order.

However creditable the achievement of the poet we must defer to **the Holy Spirit** for the inspiration and the preserved content of this literature. We must equally avoid the laudable idea that the book is to be summed up by its testimony to the power and **sovereignty of God** alone. There is within it as Chesterton sees clearly far more than philosophy. There is Christology at its heart. The suffering not just of the good but of **the best** is the nub and crux of the book and this in the faith of Job, the statements of Elihu, the LORD’S questions which mirror a **loving understanding** of His entire creation and the His closing recommendation of **Job’s theology of redemption** get us to the core of the book and the purpose of human life. Thus **the ineffability of God** resolves in the Redeemer ineffably made man. This is the one thing that makes harrowing suffering bearable in the knowledge that the repeated sorrows of the ages are felt up in heaven and that a day will dawn when all tears shall be wiped away.

At some points in his larger brief Chesterton is unreliable. He has the curious notion that God is causing Job to see an idiotic universe so that “to startle man (Job) God becomes for a moment a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist” God indeed uses what later became known as the Socratic method of teaching but never presents as a closet atheist and as an apparent blasphemer. Were Chesterton to read the pure Hebrew text he would have feel much less demur about such off-piste flourishes of the literary pen. On another count this literary genius warrants wary watching. He says “The Book of Job is the first great cataract that creates the river of religious doubt.” This is not nearly a fit summary of the book

though within the Book as Chesterton rightly detects there is a search after the subtle and unseen events that involve Satan and sin and by their nature demand an extension of the right arm of God that we call salvation. He adds that “the right method to apply to arrogant doubt is to **tell the doubter to go on doubting until he doubts himself**”. The story of Job is not a montage of agnosticism nor is Job a doubting Thomas. The method of defraying doubt is to direct the mind to **the grandeur of creation** and the glory and **credibility of the divine providences** in limiting and governing the world providentially and the glory of the good news of redemption whether at its birth when the morning stars sang together or in its declaration in the glorious zodiac of God or in the girding up of a man of faith as a warrior and a man of truth and a priest and king and then supremely in reassuring Job over and over again that the LORD can stem the murderous attack of Satan and battle with him (41.8).

So this 18<sup>th</sup> book of the bible which is also the first to be written introduces us to the “dawn of world redemption” in days when the deluge was fresh in the mind and the Zodiac of Enoch still carried the story of salvation’s plan and Egypt was under the Hyksos kings. The book in its chapters 36-37 presents a quasi New Testament picture and the knowledge “from afar” and the “righteousness that comes from the Maker” is a welcome “shower bath from on high” after the very earthy notions of Job’s three comforters. As an eliminator to the truths that God teaches and works out in Job’s life and the lives of his comforters and family these chapters reward reading and supply a significant doctrinal underlay of the Book.

I dedicated numerous Sundays and then over a month of long hours and persistent study to this engrossing book and commend the results to the reader with the immortal words which God printed in millions of books for Job and saints have inscribed in lead on their tombs “**I know that my redeemer lives and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth!**”(19.25). This great day is now in full view and “the treasures of the ice and hail”(38.22) which Chesterton interprets as accompanying the Armageddon are somewhere ahead despite what is popularly known as the day of “global warming”.

I commend this sizeable commentary No.18 to the reader on the eve of my birthday.

**Bob Coffey**

**A Bible Companion**

Westgate

The third week of May 20-2011