

The Bible Student

The Bible Champion

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

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Editors:

WILLIAM M. MCPHEETERS, D. D.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D. D., LL. D.

SAMUEL M. SMITH, D. D.

JOHN D. DAVIS, PH. D., D. D.



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The R. L. Bryan Company Press, Columbia, S. C.

ON SALE BY—FLEMING H. REVELL CO., New York, Chicago and Toronto.
JOHN WANAMAKER, New York and Philadelphia.
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION, Philadelphia.
PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION, 1001 Main St., Richmond, Va.

The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

Vol. V., New Series.

APRIL, 1902.

Number 4.

**A Significant
Deliverance
From the Liberal
Theology.**

An able and influential journal of very decided liberal proclivities has published recently a very significant editorial entitled, "The Dangers of Liberal Theology."* The source gives great emphasis to the dangers advertised, certainly such a catalogue should command the respect of all. There is in this presentation no bias of conservatism calling for discount, we can take the dangers at their full face value.

Let the reader bear steadily in mind that in the following paragraphs he is listening to the voice of advanced liberalism.

First Danger.

1. Its first conclusion reduces the authority of inspiration. The Bible contains errors. It must be tested by standards which we set up. It is a record of the progress of the generations seeking after God, now succeeding, now failing, but moving onward presumably under divine impulse, but so confusing the divine with the human that it is our task to disentangle them. Whatever may be said for the truth of this view of the

Bible, it indubitably puts God further off. We no longer seem to hear his very voice. We hear Moses, perhaps, or David, or Isaiah, or John, or Paul, but we are not quite sure that we hear God. What is said may appeal to us as noble and true, but it lacks something of that external authority which comes down directly from the throne of God and compels instant and unquestioning obedience.

2. Again the liberal **Second Danger.** theology converts into myth, legend,

poetry, or romance much that we had formerly believed to be the veracious accounts of miracles performed among men by the visible, audible interposition of God. We no longer believe if we accept the higher criticism, that the world was made in six days, or that Adam was made out of dust by a word, or Eve out of a rib, or that a miraculous flood covered all the earth, or that the miracles of Moses, Elijah, Jonah and Daniel are true history. If we are well inoculated with the higher criticism, we begin to question whether the miracles of our Lord differed from the cures which the imagination accomplishes to-day. Even the physical resurrection of Christ is discredited,

* *The Independent* (N. Y.), January 23, 1902, p. 280.

felt or did not feel the spur of public opinion. Furthermore, the social or political position of the offender made a great difference in the eyes of the Roman officials. Paul, a Jew of Tarsus, might champion Christianity, although he was a Roman citizen, without causing great scandal, especially as his citizenship was inherited not presented to him. But the case was very different when the offender was Pomponia Graecina, the wife of a consul at Rome (Tac: *An.* xiii. 32), or a member of Domitian's own family (Dion Cass., lxxvii. 15). The disastrous effects of such apostasies upon the national religion could not be overlooked. Finally the individual spirit of the provincial governors, who exercised such great authority in these matters,* was a most important factor. If the governor of a given province chanced to be a stickler for the national faith he could of course make it very unpleasant for all apostates or proselyters. But as it was to his interest to live at peace with his subjects and as the average Roman governor paid little attention to matters of religion, we may safely infer that in the provinces at least Christian processes of this kind were comparatively rare. In fact, all the trials for apostasy of which we have any knowledge occurred in Rome and among members of the upper classes where, as we have seen, the authorities could not afford to ignore them.†

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

JOB'S PHILOSOPHY OF AFFLICTION.

PROF. WILLIAM BRENTON GREENE, JR., D. D., PRINCETON, N. J.

We have this in Job i. 21: "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah."

The Patriarch's oxen and asses have been stolen. His sheep have been destroyed by a thunderbolt. His camels have been seized and driven off. His servants have been killed at the same time. A tornado has struck the house of his eldest son and all

*As to the extent of these powers, cp. Harnack: *Das Edict des Antoninus Pius*, p. 47.

†For an enumeration of cases of this kind, cp. Conrat: *Die Christenverfolgungen im röm. Reiche*, p. 49, n. 76; and Mommsen: *Der Religionsfrevel nach röm. Recht.*, in *Die Hist. Zeitschrift*, vol. 64 (1890), p. 408.

his ten children have been crushed under the falling walls. Without the slightest warning, within the same moment, successive messengers bring these terrible tidings. Blow follows blow so rapidly that it seems as if all come together. At one minute his possessions make him "the greatest of all the children of the east;" and his family render him, perhaps, the happiest. At the next he is destitute of everything as when he was born: not even one product of his long and active and God-fearing life remains. Yet he is not dazed: he is too strong for that. Neither is he unaffected: he is too true for that. He realizes exactly what has happened: he feels fully what has occurred. He goes into the deepest mourning. He says, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." And then he adds, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah." It is thus that he explains his pitiable and awful condition.

This is the true philosophy of affliction. Job did not make any mistake, nor did his extreme grief turn him away from his duty. He accounted in the right way for the trouble that had come to him. He behaved in the right manner under the stroke which had prostrated him. "In all this," the inspired narrative goes on to relate, "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job i. 22).

Job's is also a practical philosophy. He was not one who may be admired, but who cannot be imitated. On the contrary, we cannot remember his situation and not feel that the height which he reached should be attained with comparative ease by us. As Dr. W. H. Green wrote, "Job went into his trial destitute of many of those firm supports and grounds of consolation, which are now so plentifully supplied to suffering saints. Those revelations had not yet been made, upon which the believer now so firmly rests his hope in times of deep distress. He grappled with the mystery of affliction in all its unexplained darkness and difficulty until his own soul found rest. Hence, where he finds firm footing other children of sorrow may safely tread."

I. The reason for affliction. The patriarch does not take any of the views now prevalent. He does not ascribe his troubles to chance. Events are not so unrelated and so uncontrolled that they occur without reason. The wheel of fortune simply proves unfavorable to Job as it has to many since: the whole matter is

unexplained; it has no explanation. Yes, it has; and that a self-evident one. The patriarch may not understand the wisdom of the schools, but he has a view of the world which makes it impossible for him to think of anything as without reason. As high above all and sovereign over all he conceives of the self-existent God, "that shaketh the earth out of its place, and the pillars thereof tremble; that commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and sealeth up the stars; that alone stretcheth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea; that maketh the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; that doeth great things past finding out, yea, marvellous things without number" (Job ix. 6-10): and, therefore, when sorrow overwhelms him so suddenly and so mysteriously, Job accounts for it as he would for anything else; he refers it to God. "Behold, he seizeth the prey, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou" (Job ix. 12)?

Neither does the patriarch ascribe his trouble to fate. He does not conceive of events as necessary; and so, though most closely related and absolutely controlled, as taking place without reason. They could not but be, and they could not be other than they are—this is *the* reason for them, this is all that can be said in explanation of them. In a word, blind force is the reason of all things, and this is a reason in which there is no reason.

Such fatalism is probably the popular philosophy. When our lamented President was assassinated, the explanation in which very many avowedly rested was that "his time had come." The event had to be when it was and as it was. It would have been the same if more precautions had been taken and if no precautions had been taken. It was President McKinley's fate. That was all that there was to it.

Not so thought Job. He believed in fate no more than in chance. How could he? He referred everything to God, and he regarded him as the personification of wisdom and his ordinances as the highest expression of reason. "God understandeth the way *thereof*," he said, "and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; to make a weight for the wind: yea, he meteth out the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; then did he see it, and de-

clare it; he established it, yea, and searched it out" (Job xxviii. 23-27). Such a faith leaves nothing to blind force. It believes in the absolute sway of reason.

Nor, once more, does Job explain his afflictions by the operation even of rationally created and ordered forces of nature. He does not conceive of God as having planned these and set them working and then left them to go of themselves. This is the view, practically if not always theoretically, of perhaps the majority of scientists in our own day. They usually admit a divine Creator; they often admit a divine Preserver: but they commonly regard nature as self-evolving and self-regulating. A modification of this way of thinking characterizes not a few deeply religious minds. While they would not deny the sovereignty of God, they do assert that it is necessarily limited within what they are pleased to call the sphere of the ills of life. These are wholly explained by our own sins or by our circumstances or by the combination of both. God, either directly or indirectly, is the author of our blessings, but nature alone is responsible for our afflictions.

This, clearly, is not that philosophy which, as we have seen, God approves. Even if we could conceive of a man of Job's evident intellect as holding any view so inconsistent, his own language would contradict us. He distinctly sets it aside. He is told, that his oxen and asses have been stolen by the Sabeans; that his sheep have been destroyed by a thunderbolt; that his camels have been driven off by the Chaldeans; and that his children have been overwhelmed by a tornado. He does not accept any of these explanations as ultimate. "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away" is his comment. His philosophy of affliction is that God sends it.

Of course, this position is not at variance with the truth in the views just stated. Though nothing happens by chance, many things may seem to us to do so: we cannot discern their reasons. Though there is no stream of necessity or fate, every event is as certain as if there were: God's plan will surely be carried out; it includes all things; and he knows the end from the beginning. Though nothing occurs without his knowledge and control, he exercises the latter in accordance with the forces of nature: he so created and predetermined them that he might use them as "ministers of his to do his pleasure."

Nor is it otherwise in his relation to the Prince of evil himself. *He* is always the agent and the only agent of temptation. "God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man" (James i. 13). It was Satan that inspired the Sabeans and the Chaldeans to kill Job's servants and seize his cattle. It was Satan that availed himself of the thunderbolt and of the tornado to increase the patriarch's misery. It was Satan who in both these ways sought to make Job curse God. It is Satan who is the author of all our temptations, whether these come to us through adversity or through prosperity. This is a truth which cannot be emphasized too strongly. And yet, as Job realized, this is never the ultimate explanation even of our temptations. God is sovereign over Satan as truly as over the forces of nature. He no less than they is the creature of Jehovah, and equally with them enters into his eternal plan, and as they, in strict accordance with his own malignant nature, is used by God for his own glory. How God's bare permission could have been *certain* to result in the holy angel that Satan was created turning himself into the foul fiend that he became; and how Satan himself without any external temptation, could have thus debased himself,—these are mysteries apparently insoluble by the finite mind: but nothing could be revealed more clearly than that Satan, too, is absolutely under divine control. Behold him on the occasion that we are considering. He appears with the sons of God; and like them, he comes to present himself before Jehovah. What an acknowledgment of his subjection to him! Equally with the angels, he is the servant of God and cannot disobey him. True, there is evil in his head and heart, and he alone is the author of it and so culpable for it. Already he is plotting against Job and against God. He would expose Jehovah's favorite as being at bottom no more righteous than others, and thus he would put to shame Jehovah himself. *But* he dares not attempt this without permission. He does not even venture to broach the subject until God affords him the opportunity by asking him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth." Nay, beyond this is the sovereignty of God manifested. As our Confession of Faith well says, "the providence of God extended itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and

powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends" (Conf. of Faith, v. 4). Thus Jehovah tells Satan just how far he may tempt Job. "All that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand" (Job i. 12). Even, therefore, when affliction is the work of the great Adversary himself it is true that the ultimate reason of it is to be found in God. This is the supreme truth with reference to it. In the last analysis, he, and he only, hath sent it. "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away."

II. The true attitude toward affliction. What should be its effect upon the life? This, too, the patriarch shows us. In the same breath with which he says, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away," he adds, "Blessed be the name of Jehovah." This does not mean that he did not regard the blows which had fallen on him as really blows. The conviction that it was God who had afflicted him did not make the affliction itself any the less distressing to him. Neither was his suffering mitigated by the reflection that God intended it to "work for him more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." This blessed truth so familiar to us had not yet been revealed. Nor was the patriarch's attitude one simply of submission to the inevitable, even though that was conceived as the will of the personal God. *The* characteristic of Job's philosophy of affliction, as always of the true philosophy of it, is that it is *positive*. Not only does it keep him from murmuring at what has befallen him; it prompts him at once to gratitude for what he has lost. Though Jehovah has taken away his children and property, he blesses him for having bestowed them in the first place. As Dr. Green has said, "the bitterness of his loss is made the measure of the preciousness of the blessing God had given. Every pang that now rends his heart is a fresh proof how gracious God has been." Such is the practical result of the philosophy that it is God who sends trouble.

III. The explanation. Why should the conviction that our afflictions are to be referred ultimately to God enable us to regard them as we have just seen that Job did. The answer to this inquiry our limits permit us only to outline.

1. That it is God who sends trouble assures us that it cannot be a mistake. It comes from one who is infinite in knowledge and

wisdom, and so incapable of an error of judgment. Hence, it must be perfectly adapted to its purpose. On no one, however, of the hypotheses considered would there be any ground for believing this. Chance excludes wisdom. So does fate. By themselves the forces of nature cannot guarantee it. Satan often overreaches himself. It is only as we trace our affliction to God that we can have the comfort of knowing that at least it has been ordered wisely.

2. Because it is God who sends trouble we may be as sure that it is right. He can neither do nor conceive evil. As, therefore, as we have just seen, his purpose in afflicting us cannot miscarry; so it itself must be what it ought to be. But on no other view than Job's can we be certain of this. Either chance or fate is a conception which forbids the thought of right or of wrong. The forces of nature, unless regarded as controlled by a person, exclude the moral outlook. If trouble is ascribed to Satan, its purpose, like his nature, must be evil. Thus it is only because it is God who afflicts us that we can be sure that it is all right. Must not every one who loves the right be helped and comforted by this?

3. That it is God who sends trouble proves that our affliction is good as well as right. Job was not aware of this, at least at first, but we should be. It has been clearly revealed, both that Christ is Lord of the universe, and that he is "head over all things to the church." It is not more certain, therefore, that nothing can happen contrary to his will than it is certain that whatever happens, it must contribute to the true interests of his church. Indeed, to redeem, sanctify, and glorify her,—this is his righteousness. He may cast her into the furnace, and she will deserve it; but his primary purpose will be that she may "come forth as gold." It would seem to be self-evident, however, that only one who, like Job, makes God sovereign can believe that such must be the outcome of his as of all afflictions. Can there fail, then, to be great comfort for the Christian in this philosophy? What on earth should be so precious to him as the church for which his own Redeemer gave his life?

4. Because it is God who sends trouble, we may be sure that it is specially good for the Christian to whom it comes. In God's administration the advantage of the individual is never sacrificed

to the general interest. On the contrary, the latter is promoted by means of the former. Though he contemplates a redeemed race, he chose each member of the ransomed host in Christ Jesus before the world was. Though he sent his Son to be "the propitiation for the whole world," he loved each one of his own and gave himself up for each one of them. To the cry of the least one of his children his ear is ever open. He understands afar off the thoughts of each one of them. He calls each one of them by name. He has numbered the very hairs of their heads. Therefore, as "head over all things to the church," he is head over all things to each member of it; and so we are taught that "all things work together for good to them that love God, even to them that are called according to his purpose." It is distinctly through the highest good of each one of them that the good of the whole is to be secured. Outside of Job's philosophy, however, there is no basis for such a doctrine as this. If the will of Satan be the ultimate reason of our trouble, then, of course, it must be evil for us and only evil. If, on the other hand, it be due finally to any merely natural process, the individual is bound to be more or less sacrificed. Thus "natural selection," as also those teach who would exalt it most, would develop the species through the destruction of all but its strongest members. It is only when we conceive of everything as determined by a divine election that we can have rational ground for the belief that even for the poorest and weakest and most unworthy of God's children each one of their afflictions is "working out more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." *God* alone could or would choose thus. Must not this reflection dispose us to bless him, as Job did, for what he gave even when he takes it away? The very taking of it away is the expression of his grace to us.

5. It is more. It is the unique occasion and revelation of his sympathy with us. "He is afflicted with us in all our afflictions." When he sends us into the furnace of affliction that we may "come forth as pure gold," though he himself needs no purifying, he leads us into it, he walks with us in it, he is the last to leave it. Now will not this sympathy derive its supreme worth just from the fact that it is God who sends us into the furnace? This insures the intelligence of the sympathy. God must know just what we are suffering as well as how much we can bear; for he

determined it as well as created us. Again, it makes the sympathy infinite. The second-rate God that modern thought conceives of is not infinite, and so is not God: the affliction that he may not be conceived as sending he is, nevertheless, powerless to prevent. Finally, it is the very fact that God does send trouble himself that gives to his sympathy a depth and tenderness that otherwise, even as God's, it could not have. It is precisely when and because the mother chastens her child herself, that she feels most keenly that she and he are one. What wonder that Job could say, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah." To appreciate that it is *God* who sends trouble must have this issue.