Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Job

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Introduction

Difference between Old and New Testaments as to knowledge of redemption and a Redeemer

The Chetubim, or Hagiographa, in which I do not now comprehend Daniel (though his book has a character distinct from the other prophets) form a very distinct and interesting part of divine revelation. None of them suppose an accomplished and known redemption, in the New Testament sense of the word, though like every blessing all is founded on it. In Job a single passage gives a particular application of the term: "I have found a ransom" (Copher). The Psalms recount we know, prophetically, the sorrows and sufferings in which it was accomplished.

But redemption by blood is known by faith, when accomplished, whether by the Jew or the Christian. Isaiah prophesies of Israel's recognition of it fully. There were also, as we know, shadows of it under the law. But the knowledge of eternal redemption is christian knowledge, or that of the Jews when they look on Him whom they pierced. Till Christ's death, the veil was unrent, the holiest unapproachable. There was knowledge more or less clear of a Redeemer — of a personal Redeemer to come; of God's favour towards those that walked with Him, and the confidence of faith in Him and in His promises. But there was no such knowledge of sin as led, God being revealed, to the consciousness of exclusion from His presence as a present state, nor of such a putting of it away as reconciled us fully and for ever to God by its efficacy, and brought us to Him.

The Poetical Books the divinely given expression of man's experience under God's government

The books we are treating of are not prophecies of God's dealings or actings, save as the Psalms express future deliverance by power and by God's judgments; but they are the divinely given expression of man's thoughts and feelings under the government of God,* and the explanatory revelation of God before redemption is fully known. This process has mainly gone on in Israel; and hence they are in the main the various expression of God's ways with Israel. Still, what was carried out there, under revealed conditions and prophetic communications in direct government, was what was in principle true of God's ways everywhere, though there specially displayed (the question of man's positive righteousness being raised too there by the law, the perfect rule of life for the sons of Adam). {* And these pass into what Christ's were in His humiliation and sufferings, and thus become prophecies of His sufferings, but in the form of His feelings under them, and this of infinite price to us.

The scope of the book of Job

The Book of Job affords us the example of the relationship of a godly man outside and doubtless before Israel, and God's dealings with men for good in this world of evil; but then it runs up, I doubt not, into a clear type of Israel in result Those ways are fully displayed in that people. And it is to be remarked that, when Job practically feels the impossibility of man's being righteous with God, he complains of fear

and having no daysman between them; and Elihu, who takes up this ground in God's stead, explains not redemption but chastising and government. These things God wrought oftentimes with man (Job 33, 36).

Ecclesiastes: Can fallen man find happiness and rest in this world without redemption?

Ecclesiastes estimates this world under the same government, in its present fallen state, and raises the question whether by any means man can find happiness and rest there, with no trace of the knowledge of redemption. Nor is there any recognised relationship with God. It is always Elohim (God), never Jehovah, fearing God and keeping His commandments being the whole duty of man as such.

The standpoint of the Song of Solomon and of Proverbs

The Song of Solomon affords direct relationship with the Lord, the Son of David, the ardent affections which belong to the relationship with Christ; Proverbs, a guidance through the mixed and entangled scene, and here all is on the ground of relationship with Jehovah, God (Elohim) being only once or twice mentioned in a way which does not affect this (see more fully note to page 24). But none place themselves on the ground of known redemption. They do look for redemption by power. Hence, on the contrary, Romans begins with the revelation of wrath from heaven, not government, against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness where truth was, against Gentile and Jew,* and brings in redemption, personal justification, and righteousness — God's righteousness. The case of Gentile and Jew is fully gone into, and brought out as before God Himself, and wrath from heaven the necessary consequence; complete redemption by blood for heaven, and sovereign grace reigning through righteousness and giving us a place with the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven, together with the result for Israel hereafter. All is made clear in the light as God is in the light — His eternal redemption, and heavenly places, though finally earth will be blessed. But we are pilgrims and strangers here. This is our place by redemption itself. To the Abrahams and Davids it was so, by getting nothing of what was promised, or else persecution under the government of God upon the earth; so that under that order of things it was after all a puzzle to both, though the final inheritance of the land, the heir, and the judgment of the wicked, known by revelation, met the puzzle in their minds. {* And note here Psalm 14, which he quotes as proof of sin in the Jew, and Isaiah 59, both end in deliverance in Jerusalem by power. In Romans it is met by present justification by blood.}

Eternal relationship and present, known redemption unknown in the Poetical Books

But in Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, which express men's feelings under it, this puzzle is fully manifested. Faith and confidence in God may get over it, or persevere through it; prophetic testimonies may meet it; but it is there, and this earth is the scene of the reply of God, even if their faith might be sometimes forced to rise above it, nourished by personal confidence in God. But a present fixed eternal relationship with God even our Father through redemption, in a wholly new scene into which we are

brought by that precious blood, whose shedding has glorified God Himself, and reconciled us to Him, though yet in an unredeemed body, — that was unknown. Much was learned, learned as to God, and this was most precious. But the actual result for Job was more camels and sheep, and fairer daughters; in the Psalms, judgment of enemies, and deliverance through mercy that endured for ever, and an earth set free under heaven's judicial rule; in Ecclesiastes, as to the perception of the present effect of government, that man must fear God, keep His commandments, and leave it there. Present known redemption is nowhere found. And oh what a difference, an unbounded difference, this makes! "As he is, so are we in this world. " He who redeemed us is gone to His Father and our Father, His God and our God. Proverbs and the Song of Solomon have, as I have said, another character, though referring to the same scene: Proverbs, not man's feelings in the scene, but God's guidance through it by the experience and wisdom of divinely instructed authority;* and the Song of Solomon, the carrying the heart quite out of it all, though still in it, not by known redemption, but by devoted affection to Messiah, and of Messiah to Israel, by the revelation He makes of Himself, indeed of His love to them to beget it in Israel's heart. {* It will much help the reader as to the character of this book and Ecclesiastes to remark, that in Proverbs the name Jehovah is always employed, save in Proverbs 25:2, where it is "Elohim," and "her God," Proverbs 2:17. But this is not an exception: that is, it is recognised relationship with the revealed God of Israel. Whereas in Ecclesiastes Jehovah is never found. It is always Elohim, the abstract name of God without any idea of relationship: God as such in contrast with man and every creature, and man having to find out experimentally his we place and happiness as such, without special revealed relationship with God. In Job the editor, if I may so speak, or historian who gives the dialogues, always uses Jehovah; but in the body of the book Job, unless at any rate once as to the government of God (Job 12:9), and Elihu constantly, use the name of Almighty, the Abrahamic name of God, or simply God. The friends generally use God, or particularly Eliphaz the Almighty, sometimes it is only, He. Zophar, I think, uses no name. The dialogue is characterised by God or Almighty.

These exercises of heart have their place in us now, for we are in the world; but in the consciousness of accomplished redemption and the present care of a holy Father, the perfection of whose ways, as seen in Christ, is the model of our conduct. We can take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, knowing in ourselves that we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance; and glory in tribulation, because it works its needed end, and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us. This is another case, and a blessed one it is.

I think these general remarks will help us to understand the books which are now about to occupy us. I turn to the books themselves.

Job, the upright and righteous man, put to the test; his exercises and God's dealings

After what I have said, the Book of Job will not require a long examination — not that it fails in interest, but because when the general idea is once laid hold of, it is the detail which is interesting, and detail is not our present object.

In the Book of Job we have one portion of those exercises of heart which this division of the holy book supplies. These are not joyful exercises, but those of a heart which, journeying through a world in which the power of evil is found, and not being dead to the flesh, not having that divine knowledge which the gospel furnishes, not dead as to one's self with Christ nor possessing Christ in resurrection, is not capable of enjoying in peace, whatever its own conflicts may be, the fruit of God's perfect love; but which struggles with the evil or with the non-enjoyment of the only real good, even while desiring to possess it; while, by the means of these very revelations, the light of Christ is cast upon these exercises, and the sympathy and entering of His Spirit in grace into them practically is touchingly developed. What is learned in them is what we are — not committed sins; that was not Job's case, but the soul itself is put before God.

Chapters 1 and 2

Man put to the test and the dealings of God

In Job we have man put to the test; we might say, with our present knowledge, man renewed by grace, an upright man and righteous in his ways, in order to shew whether he can stand before God in presence of the power of evil, whether he can be righteous in his own person before God. On the other hand we find the dealings of God, by which He searches the heart and gives it the consciousness of its true state before Him.

Job and his accuser before God

All this is so much the more instructive, from its being set before us independent of all dispensations, of all especial revelation on God's part. It is the godly man, such as one of Noah's descendants would be, who had not lost the knowledge of the true God, when sin was again spreading in the world and idolatry was setting in; but the Judge was there to punish it. Job was encompassed with blessings and possessed real piety. Satan, the accuser of the servants of God, goes to and fro in the earth seeking occasion for evil, and presents himself before Jehovah among His mighty angels, the "Bene-Elohim": and God states the case of Job, the subject of His government in blessing, faithful in his walk.

Satan as God's instrument

It is carefully to be remarked here, that the spring and source of all these dealings is not Satan's accusations, but God Himself. God knew what His servant Job needed, and Himself brings forward his case and sets all in movement. If He demands of Satan if he had considered His servant Job, it is because He Himself had. Satan is but an instrument, and an ignorant though subtle instrument, to bring about God's purposes of grace. His accusations result really in nothing as against Job, save to disprove their truth by what he is allowed to do; but, for Job's good, he is left to his will up to a certain point, for the purpose of bringing Job to a knowledge of his own heart, and thus to a deeper ground of practical relationship with God. How blessed and perfect are God's ways! How vain in result the efforts of Satan against those that are His!

God as Job's justifier

Satan attributes the piety of Job to God's manifest favour and to his prosperity, to the hedge He had put around him. God gives all into the hands of Satan, who speedily excites the cupidity of Job's enemies; and they attack him and carry off all his possessions. His children perish through the effects of a storm which Satan is allowed to raise. But Job, dwelling neither on the instruments employed nor on Satan, receives this bitter cup from the hand of God without murmuring. Satan suggests again that man will, in fact, give up everything if he can preserve himself. God leaves everything to Satan except the life of His servant. Satan smites Job with a dreadful disease; but Job bows under the hand of God, fully recognising His sovereignty. Satan had exhausted his means of injuring Job, and we hear nothing more of him; but it is beautiful to see that God has hereby completely justified Job from the accusation of Satan. Job was no hypocrite. He had lost all to which Satan traced his piety, and it shone forth brighter than ever. Satan can trace the motives which work in flesh, the evil in man's heart which he excites; but grace in God, His uncaused love, and grace in man which trusts in and leans on it, he cannot measure, nor know the power of.

Chapter 3

Job's want of knowledge of his own heart and of God

But the depths of Job's heart were not yet reached, and to do this was the purpose of God, whatever Satan's thoughts may have been. Job did not know himself, and up to this time, with all his piety, he had never been in the presence of God. How often it is the case that even throughout a long life of piety the conscience has never been really set before God! Hence peace, such peace as cannot be shaken, and real liberty, are not known as yet. There is a desire after God, there is the new nature; the attraction of His grace has been felt: nevertheless God and His love, as it really is, are not known. If Satan is foiled (the grace of God having kept Job's heart from murmuring) God has yet His own work to accomplish. That which the tempest that Satan had raised against Job failed in doing, is brought about by the sympathy of his friends. Poor heart of man! The uprightness and even the patience of Job had been manifested, and Satan had no more to say. But God alone can search out what the heart really is before Him; and the absence of all self-will, perfect agreement with the will of God, absolute submission like that of Christ, these things God alone could test, and thus lay bare the nothingness of man's heart before Him. God did this with Job; revealing at the same time that He acts in grace in these cases for the good of the soul which He loves.

Job's self-satisfaction: the pride of his heart

If we compare the language of the Spirit of Christ in the Psalms, we shall often find the appreciation of circumstances expressed in almost identical terms; but instead of bitter complaints and reproaches addressed to God, we find the submission of a heart which acknowledges that God is perfect in all His ways. Job was upright, but he began to make this his righteousness; which evidently proves that he had never been really in the presence of God. The consequence of this was that, although he reasoned more

correctly than his friends, and shewed a heart that felt really far more than they what God was, he attributed injustice to God and a desire to harass him without cause (see Job 19; 23:3, 13; 13:15-18; 16:12). We find also in Job 29 that his heart had dwelt upon his upright and benevolent walk with complacency, commending himself, and feeding his self-love with it. "When the eye saw me it gave witness to me." God was bringing him to say, "Now mine eye seeth Thee and I abhor myself ." It is with these chapters (Job 29, 30, 31), which express his good opinion of himself, that Job ends his discourse; he had told his whole heart out. He was self-satisfied: the grace of God had wrought and in a lovely way in him; but the present effect through the treacherousness of the human heart, and not being in God's presence which detects it, was to make him lovely in his own eyes If (Job 9) he confesses man's iniquity (for who can deny it; and especially what converted men?), it is in bitterness of spirit, because it is useless to attempt being just with such a God. Job 6, as well as the whole of his discourse, proves that, whether it was the pride of his heart which could not bear to be found in such a state by those who had known his greatness, a state which pride would have borne in stubbornness alone, or sympathy which, in weakening that had left him to the full sense of it, it was the presence and the language of his friends that was the means of bringing out all that was in his heart. We see also in Job 30 that the pride of his heart was detected.

Chapters 4 to 31

Job's friends: their ignorance of God and His ways

As to the friends of Job, they do not call for any extended remarks. They urge the doctrine that God's earthly government is a full measure and manifestation of His righteousness, and of the righteousness of man, which would correspond with it: a doctrine which proves a total ignorance of what God's righteousness is, and of His ways; as well as the absence of all real knowledge of what God is, or man as a sinner. We do not see either that the feelings of their hearts were influenced by communion with God. Their argument is a false and cold estimate of the exact justice of His government as an adequate manifestation of His relationship with man, though they say many true commonplace things which even the Spirit of God adopts as just. Although Job was not before God in his estimate of himself, he judges rightly in these respects. He shews that although God shews His disapprobation of the wicked, yet the circumstances in which they are often found overthrow the arguments of his friends. We see in Job a heart which, although rebellious, depends upon God, and would rejoice to find Him. We see, too, that when he can extricate himself, by a few words, from his friends, who, he is quite sensible, understands nothing of his case, nor of the dealings of God, he turns to God (although he does not find Him, and although he complains that His hand is heavy upon him), as in that beautiful and touching Job 23, and the reasonings as to divine government, Job 24, Job21. That is to say, we see one who has tasted that God is gracious, whose heart, wounded indeed and unsubdued, yet claims those qualities for God — because it knows Him — which the cold reasonings of his friends could not ascribe to Him; a heart which complains bitterly of God, but which knows that, could it once come near Him, it would find Him all that it had declared Him to be, and not such as they had declared Him to be, or were themselves — could he find Him, he would not be as they were, He would put words in his mouth; a heart which repelled indignantly the accusation of hypocrisy; for Job was conscious that he looked to

God, and that he had known God and acted with reference to Him, though God thought fit to bring his sin to remembrance.

Chapters 32 to 37

Elihu: Job's self-righteousness reproved, God's ways explained and His power insisted upon

But these spiritual affections of Job did not prevent his turning this consciousness of integrity into a robe of self-righteousness which hid God from him, and even hid him from himself. He declares himself to be more righteous than God (Job 10:7-8; 16:14-17; 23:11-13; 27:2-6). Elihu reproves him for this, and on the other hand explains the ways of God. He shews that God visits man and chastises him, in order that when subdued and broken down — if there is one who can shew him the point of moral contact between his soul and God, in which his soul would stand in truth before Him* — God may act in grace and blessing, and deliver him from the evil that oppresses him. Elihu goes on to shew him that, if God chastises, it is becoming in man to set himself before God to learn wherein he has done wrong: in short, that the ways of God are right, that He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous, but if they are in affliction He shews them their transgressions, and if they return to Him in obedience when He openeth their ear to discipline, He will give them prosperity; but that the hypocrite shall perish. The first case which Elihu brings forward (Job 33) is God's dealings with men. He awakens their consciences to their state, and puts His bridle on the pride and self-will of man. God chastises and humbles him. The second is specially with the righteous (Job 36), the case of positive transgression but in one righteous in God's sight, from whom He withdraws not His eyes, in whom He allowed not iniquity; but in the first case he was in the path of destruction. It was this case which needed the interpreter to place him in uprightness before God. Finally, he insists upon the incomprehensible power of God Almighty. {* This is a very important point. God can bless in a direct manner with the light of His grace, when the soul is brought into its true place, to what it really is in His sight. Then, whatever its state may be, He can bless it, in respect of that state, with increased light and grace. If I have got far from Him, and careless in walk, when I have the consciousness how far I am, He can fully and directly bless. But the soul must be brought into the recognition of its state, or there would be no real blessing; I should not see God in unison with it. For its sensible state did not answer to its real state in God's sight. In this case it may be a first conviction of sin, or the knowledge of self where self has never been really judged, as was Job's case.}

Chapters 38 to 42

Jehovah Himself speaks: Job made to know himself

Jehovah then speaks, and addressing Job, carries on the subject. He makes Job sensible of his nothingness. Job confesses himself to be vile, and declares that he will be silent before God. The Lord resumes the discourse, and Job acknowledges that he has darkened counsel by speaking of that which

he understood not. But now, still more submissively, he declares openly his real condition. Formerly he had heard of God by the hearing of the ear; now his eye had seen Him, wherefore he abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes. This is the effect of having seen God, and of finding himself in His presence. The work of God was accomplished — the work of His perfect goodness, which would not leave Job without causing him to know himself, without bringing him into God's own presence. The object of discipline was attained, and Job is surrounded with more blessings than before.

The lessons of the book of Job

We learn two things here; first, that man cannot stand in the presence of God; and secondly, the ways of God for the instruction of the inner man.

It is also a picture of God's dealings with the Jews on the earth.

The place of Satan: God's work

The Book of Job plainly sets before us also the teaching of the Spirit, as to the place which Satan occupies in the dealings of God and His government, with respect to man on the earth. We may also remark the perfect and faithful care of God, from whom (whatever may have been the malice of Satan) all this proceeded, because He saw that Job needed it. We observe that it is God who sets the case of Job before Satan, and that the latter disappears from the scene; because here it is a question of his doings on the earth, and not of his inward temptations. Further, if God had stopped short in the outward afflictions, Job would have had fresh cause for self-complacency. Man might have judged that those afflictions were ample. But the evil of Job's heart consisted in his resting on the fruits of grace in himself, and this would have only increased the good opinion he had already entertained of himself: kind in prosperity, he would have been also patient in adversity. God therefore carries on His work, that Job may know himself.

The depths of Job's heart displayed

Either the sympathy of his friends (for we can bear alone, and from God in His presence, that which we cannot bear when we have the opportunity of making our complaint before man), or the pride which is not roused while we are alone but which is wounded when others witness our misery, or perhaps the two together, upset the mind of Job; and he curses the day of his birth. The depths of his heart. are displayed. It was this that he needed.

Job, humbled, can be blessed

We have thus, man standing between Satan, the accuser, and God, the question being not God's revelation of everlasting righteousness, but His ways with the soul of man in this world. The godly man comes into trouble. This has to be accounted for, the friends insisting that this world is an adequate expression of God's righteous government, and that consequently as Job had made great profession of piety he was a hypocrite. This he stoutly denies, but his will unbroken rises up against God. God has

chosen to do it, and he cannot help it. Only he is sure if he could find Him, He would put words in his mouth. He spoke well of Him though in rebellion, and thinking of his goodness as his own. Still he affirms that though there was a government, this world did not shew it as his friends said; but he is not broken down before God. Elihu comes in, the interpreter, one among a thousand (and practically how rare they are!) and he shews God's discipline with man and with the righteous, and rebukes both sides with intelligence. Then God comes in and puts Job in his place by the revelation of Himself; but owns Job's right feeling as to Him, and puts the friends in their true place, and Job is to intercede for them. Job, humbled, can be fully blessed. This knowledge of self in God's sight is of all importance; we are never humble nor distrustful of self till then.