

Russian sphere of control that are potentially hostile to Russian rule. This multiethnic population is monitored by Russia's elite intelligence service, but it is growing out of proportion to the native Russian population. As the *Stratfor* report states,⁶ "Russia's primary challenge, however, is time. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the bottom fell out of the Russian birthrate, with fewer than half the number of babies born in the 1990s than were born in the 1980s. These post-Cold War children are now coming of age; in a few years, their small numbers are going to have a catastrophic impact on the size of the Russian population. By contrast, most non-Russian minorities—in particular those such as Chechens and Dagestanis, who are of Muslim faith—did not suffer from the 1990s birthrate plunge, so their numbers are rapidly increasing even as the number of ethnic Russians is rapidly decreasing. Add in deep-rooted, demographic-impacting problems such as HIV, tuberculosis and heroin abuse—concentrated not just among ethnic Russians but also among those of childbearing age—and Russia faces a

hard-wired demographic time bomb. Put simply, Russia is an ascending power in the short run, but it is a declining power in the long run. The Russian leadership is well aware of this coming crisis, and knows it is going to need every scrap of strength it can muster just to continue the struggle to keep Russia in one piece".

Encouragement to look for Jesus' return

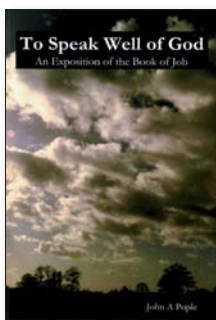
We can appreciate the pressure that this puts on Russia to secure its position in the world and to dominate the Middle East, "to take a spoil, and to take a prey" while it thinks that it is able to do so. It is clear that the conditions in the world, geographical relationship and ethnic ties now favour close relations between Turkey, Russia, Iraq and Iran—a situation that seems to have come about naturally yet under the Divine hand to bring about His purpose to set up over the world as King "the lowest of men".

6. Op. cit.

Reviews

"Have you considered My servant Job?"

John Nicholls



***To Speak Well of God:
An Exposition of the
Book of Job***
John A. Pople (2010)
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THE BOOK OF JOB is a continuing challenge for us. It is not at all a straightforward book about suffering. We read it year by year and keep finding contradictions in the arguments of Job and his three friends. It is not easy to follow the gist of their arguments. We can have a knock at the door from Jehovah's Witnesses, which can

involve us in discussion about Job's Satan and whether or not he is a personal Devil. There are differing views among brethren about who the Satan is, ranging from an angel to some unnamed person.

Brethren in the Truth who have ventured to expound Job seem to have different ideas about the role of Elihu in the drama. And at the end of

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the book, where the Lord answers Job, we find it difficult to understand from that answer what exactly God was telling His righteous servant. It is a book about suffering that seems to pose more questions than it answers, and we find it hard to see how it all fits together. And sometimes we feel that Job's God is rather different from the merciful Father that we know from other scriptures.

Brother John Pople has gone a long way towards presenting a coherent and logical analysis of the book of Job, and enabling us to see that the same loving God Who fashions us throughout our lives to grow into His sons and daughters was working in the same way in the lives of Job and his three friends. A handful of brethren² have written expositions of Job, and these have been great stimulus to further study of this book; but, having read the book under review and a synopsis of it, the reviewer thinks that it gives a satisfying and coherent exposition.

Who is the Satan in the prologue?

Key to understanding the book is how we see the Satan in the Prologue (Job 1–2). The author makes three observations about the Satan. The definite article is used, so The Satan could be a metaphorical character rather than a proper name. The Satan is an adversary or opponent of God. And this Satan is stupid because he thinks he is cleverer than God!

All this suggests that the Satan represents human pride, which, in the context of the book of Job, is that of Job's three friends. The author sees the 'conversation' between God and the Satan as a literary device. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar worship with Job in the assembly; and, because of his wealth, possessions and children, the sight of him makes them jealous and causes them to feel a sense of injustice. God hears the thoughts of their hearts as clearly as if they had been words spoken aloud.

God's response is not heard by the three friends because the Satan is unaware that he is in conversation with God. This satisfies an essential requirement that the three friends have no knowledge of the events of the prologue; otherwise the subsequent debate about why Job is suffering would not occur. The 'conversation' in Job is a poetic recapitulation of how God responds to the thoughts He sees in the hearts of pride-laden men.

The sufferings brought upon Job are explained similarly. The friends see Job and think, "Does God not realise that the reason why Job is God-fearing is because of all the material blessings

He has given him?". God 'replies' (though this is unheard by the three men), "You think that if Job loses all his material possessions he'll curse Me? You have things to learn. I'll empower your wicked thoughts and act on them. I'll bring destruction on Job, and you will see, through the perseverance of My servant, the kind of God I am and what I am working to achieve".

If we jump forward to the end of the story, we see that the three friends are brought to salvation by what happens to Job. So the reason why God 'provoked' the barter with the Satan was because He was intending to save those who were infected with human pride. We can therefore see the love of God at work in this whole saga.

Brother John gives reasons why he believes Job was a Gentile whilst the friends were descended from Abraham, and also why he thinks the whole drama unfolded during the wilderness journey under Moses. He discusses at some length the friends' idea of the doctrine of retribution, which suggests that anyone who suffers does so because God is punishing them for their sins. As the debate develops, even Job himself becomes infected with pride, and demands an audience with God to display his righteousness.

The role of Elihu

I thought that Brother John's understanding of Elihu was particularly helpful. He suggests that Elihu should be understood as a type of John the Baptist, because Elihu's intervention was to prepare Job for God's speech from the whirlwind. He gives several reasons for this:

- 1 Elihu introduced the arrival of the Word of God.
- 2 Elihu 'straightened the way' by rebutting the friends' arguments, correcting a few errors of Job and praising the justice and goodness of God.
- 3 He anticipated God's revelations to Job by speaking of God delivering man from his pride.
- 4 Like the Baptist, having heralded the Word of God, he disappears from the scene ("He must increase, but I must decrease"—Jno. 3:30).

2. L. G. Sargent (1965), *Ecclesiastes and Other Studies*, The Christadelphian, Birmingham; C. C. Walker (1935), *Job*, The Christadelphian, Birmingham; R. T. Lovelock (1957), *Job*, The Christadelphian, Birmingham; D. Baird (2002), *The Education of Job*, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service; J. Balchin (1998), *Sitting with Job*, Rhoswel Books.

Whence then Job's suffering? Iconically, it was a consequence of sin, just as his three friends had said all along. But not his sin, as they had supposed: theirs. Their intractable pride kept them from union with their God. But because God loved them, and saw the persevering faith of His servant Job, He devised a plan by which their pride would be brought into such sharp relief that they would be able at last to recognise their error, repent and find grace. And what an immense degree of suffering Job had to bear for this to come to fruition! such is the degree of damage human pride inflicts on the world. Yet now that we can see the true source of the suffering—human pride—God is justified even as Job suffers. This is a huge revelation, because it relieves us from the need to be defensive concerning God's conduct.

To Speak Well of God, John Pople, p. 310

This is why he is not condemned at the end of the book of Job. Elihu was a good man whom God used to prepare Job for what He had to tell him.

God answers Job

The reply of God to Job in chapters 38–41 is difficult to understand, as God appears simply to be referring to His creation. Of course, the closer we get to the things of the creation of God, which is all around us, the more we can appreciate His great power and infinite wisdom. We can appreciate His love of variety and beauty, and also in a way His mercy; for there are many species that seem to us vulnerable and liable for extinction, and yet they still survive.

How are we to understand the two speeches of God? Brother John sees the first one (chapters 38, 39) as God asking Job if he is as good as God is at controlling wild beasts. These chapters seem to mirror much of the Creation account in Genesis 1; and it is true that we can be humbled and greatly in awe of our Maker as we contemplate the vastness of all of His creation. But Job's response was not enough for our God, Who could see that there was still much pride left in His servant.

The second speech, where God describes Behemoth and Leviathan to Job, is in chapters 40 and 41. Brother John suggests these are visionary beasts (there is much difficulty in relating them to known creatures) whose purpose is to represent human pride. God asks Job, "Can you control the beast of human pride?". This beast brings every man down and cannot be defeated except by the Word of God. Brother John makes a link to the temptation of Christ (also in the wilderness, like

the friends), who defeated the temptations at the beginning of his ministry solely by recourse to the Word of His Father.

To speak well of God

At the end of the book, Job is used by God to mediate for his friends, just as at the beginning of the book he interceded for his children. Brother John suggests that Job, without "father or mother" (in the Scriptural record), was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. He also receives at the end a double blessing, as that of the first-born, for he receives twice as much as he had before his great trial began, except for the number of children. In this respect, the author suggests, God was promising Job the resurrection, and that his God would also redeem his first family of children at the end time.

In all these things Job mirrors the work of the Lord Jesus and gives us an exhortation to pray earnestly for our loved ones and friends that they might be recipients of the mercy and salvation of our God. As well as the theme that out of suffering can come salvation, Brother John sees another theme running through the book of Job, that of 'speaking well of God'. It comes early in the book, when we are told that Job sacrificed for his children in case they had "cursed God in their hearts" (1:5). At the end Job was commended because he 'spoke of God the thing that was right', unlike his three friends (42:7).

Conclusions

The book of Job is a great exhortation for us. As a character he excelled, for did he not say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (13:15)? And James commends to us the "patience [endurance] of Job" (5:11). The exposition by Brother John Pople will be a great help in understanding the book better. It is engagingly written, with touches of cricket and rugby humour which those of us on this side of the Pond appreciate!

The book has 334 pages, a bibliography and an appendix, where Brother John compares eight expositions of the book with his own. I found this very useful. His book gives us some insights as to how God may work in the lives of those He is bringing to salvation. It is a lovely book, which the reviewer thoroughly enjoyed reading, and is commended to the Brotherhood. Above all, he presents us with a coherent picture of the book that enhances our appreciation of the love and mercy of our God in bringing many sons to glory through the things that they suffer.