

Preface To The Book Of Job (1545 and 1524)

The book of Job deals with the question, whether misfortune can come to the righteous from God. Job stands fast, and holds that God chastises even the righteous without reason, to His praise, as Christ also says, in John 3:9, of the man who was born blind.

His friends take the other side and make a great, long talk, defending God's justice, and saying that He punishes no righteous man; if He punishes, then the man who is punished must have sinned. They have a worldly and human idea of God and His righteousness, as though He were like a man and His law were like the world's law.

Job, to be sure, when he is in danger of death, talks, in his human weakness, too much against God, and thus sins amidst his sufferings; nevertheless, he insists that he has not deserved this suffering more than others have; and that is true. But at last God decides that Job, by speaking against Him, has spoken wrongly, in his suffering; but that he spoke the truth in what he said, replying to his friends, about his innocence before the suffering came. Thus this book leads the history up to this point, — God alone is righteous, and yet one man is more righteous than another, even before God.

It is written for our comfort, in order that we may know that God allows even His great saints to stumble, especially in adversity. Before Job comes into fear of death, he praises God at the theft of his goods and the death of his children; but when death is in prospect and God withdraws Himself, his words show what kind of ideas a man, however holy he may be, has against God, when he gets the notion that God is not God, but only a judge and wrathful tyrant, who applies force and cares nothing about a good life. This is the finest part of this book. It is understood only by those who also experience and feel what it is to suffer the wrath and judgment of God, and to have His grace hidden.

The language of this book is more lofty and splendid than that of any other book in all the Scriptures, and if it were translated everywhere word for word (as the Jews and foolish translators would have it done), and not, for the most part, according to the sense, no one would understand it; as, for example, when he says "The thirsty will drink up his goods," meaning, "Robbers shall take them from him"; or "The children of pride have not gone therein," i.e., "the young lions, that stalk proudly"; and many similar cases. Again, by "light" he means "good fortune," by "darkness," "misfortune," etc.

Therefore, I think that this third part must take its medicine, and the wiseacres must say of it that it is an entirely different book from the Latin Bible. Let them go. We have done our best to use language that is clear and that everybody can understand, giving the genuine sense and meaning. We can allow anyone to improve on it.