

Representing God

‘There’s this guy in a restaurant just looking at his drink. He stays like that for a half hour. Then this big troublemaking truck driver walks into the restaurant as if he owns the place, steps over to the man, grabs his glass, and immediately drinks it all down. The poor man starts crying. The truck driver is mean, but he never intended to make a grown man cry. He says, “Come on man, I was just funnin’ with ya. Tell ya what: I’ll buy ya another drink. But ya gotta stop that cryin’”. “No, it’s not the drink”, the man replied. “This is the worst day of my life. Nothing has gone right. First, I sleep in and get to work late, so my boss fires me. I leave the building, and someone has just stolen my car. The police say they can do nothing. I get a cab to return home, and when I leave it, I remember I left my wallet with my credit cards on the seat. When I get home my wife is driving away in our other car with all of her luggage on top. So I walk down here to this restaurant to end all this suffering. And then you show up and gulp down my entire drink. And all the poison I had was in that one glass!”

Well, we might commiserate with that man. Though he had lost a whole lot, he still had a house in which to lay his head, to say nothing of his health! In that, he was a whole lot better off than was perhaps the most famous suffering person of all time.

We know him by the name of Job. The Book of Job is almost certainly the oldest book in the Bible. While the historical story it records is nowhere near the farthest back in time, since Genesis 1 speaks of the very beginning of time, Job itself was written far earlier than the time of Moses, through whom God dictated Genesis, and the next four books of the Bible. Though the Bible itself does not specify when Job lived, it seems certain that he lived hundreds of years before Moses was born, and Abraham. On the order probably around 700 years before Moses, putting him in the generations arising shortly after the Great Flood of Noah's time.

While we don't know exactly when he lived, we also have no real idea who wrote the account of his archetypal life. There are many theories, among them Job himself, which would necessitate another author to have concluded the book with the account of Job's own death at the age of somewhere around 240 years old. This was not unheard of since we know that Moses wrote Deuteronomy, but obviously could not have written the account of his own death, which most likely was added on to what Moses wrote by his protege, Joshua. Some subscribe to the theory that God only used Jews to write the original scriptures. Indeed, while almost all were, in the New Testament, it seems more likely that the books of Luke and Acts, were written by a Gentile, namely Luke himself as he is identified as being their author, and he writes in the first person in long sections of Acts. Some scholars try to make the case that Luke was also a Jew, but this is, in my view,

not a necessary qualification for authorship of any part of the Holy Bible, particularly in view that Luke and Acts are both in the New Testament, which records the beginnings of the grafting in of the Gentiles into the olive tree of the faithful Jewish nation, the true spiritual people of God.

Job is one of the most important books of the Bible because it deals head on with the problem of human suffering. I find it unfortunate that the commonly used lectionaries include readings from only two different chapters of Job and of these, only one reading per year. So, for this year, we've read the final chapter of Job. I trust you all have read the whole of Job during your own personal Bible readings over the years. And so you know what caused Job's unimaginable sufferings—satan himself. From the first two chapters we are given a glimpse of how satan likes to spend his time—accusing God's people of sin. Christ our Lord directly says in John 10:10 that the devil is a thief who comes to “kill, steal and destroy”. And in Revelation 12:10, satan is named as “the accuser of our brothers and sisters [who] has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night”. We see clearly that he's been in the accusation business a very long time, and must be pretty good at it by now. And how much accusation and accusing we see going on in 2020!

In the concluding chapter of Job, which follows God's direct four-chapter lecture answering both Job and his friends, Job apologizes to God, repenting of his presumption and arrogance in

ascribing motives to God which he could in no way have any idea of, being a life form created by God. How in the world can a creation have the foggiest idea of anything regarding its Creator? To think otherwise is truly the height of conceit and arrogance. And do we see much of that in America today? When I see and hear what so many people, from powerful politicians in Washington, D.C., to local people right here in our own city, to even random comments by ordinary people on the street, pontificating about this and that, when they should innately know that they haven't even one clue about what they're talking about, my breath is taken away. So often is my breath taken away that it's a wonder I'm still alive! Do people hear themselves? Their total ignorance and foolishness is apparently so great that they can't see it anymore.

Job's friends were also guilty of this. In spades. While God had every right to take offense at Job's ill-advised, in-the-heat-of-the-moment-in-the-midst-of-his-great-suffering wrong-headed comments, He was most provoked by Job's friends. Reading through the whole book, we see how they felt they needed to somehow explain the why of Job's predicament, as if that would somehow bring Job some comfort. We, too, try to find some, ultimately asinine, reason for why someone's child died in a tragic accident, or an athlete in the prime of life succumbs to cancer, etc., etc. For heaven's sake, can't we just accept the fact that we don't know the reasons because we're not God? Just like Job and his friends could not spy into the courts of heaven and listen

in on the conversation between satan and God. But God did reveal just that to the author of the book of Job to help us grasp the reality of how little we actually know about anything! Even the devil himself is exposed as to how limited he is in comparison to God Who created him, too. The devil's pride is unmasked, as a warning to us who start stinking to high heaven when we let our own pride get the better of us. Case in point: the mindless nihilist anarchists burning Bibles two weeks ago in Portland, Oregon.

Aside from Job's friends foolish attempts to comfort Job in his suffering, which ultimately caused him even greater distress, they themselves sinned against God by misrepresenting God. Can you imagine? We each know ourselves, more or less. Who we are. What we are. What we think. What we do. Not just in public, but in private when nobody's looking. Most of us, being faithful Christians and followers of our Master Jesus, are not in the habit of living some double life. A good life, and a second, dastardly, wanton life of sin. No that is not us. For we have God's gracious Holy Spirit in us growing in us His good fruit. But if someone who barely knows you, or doesn't know you at all, opens their mouth and accuses you of heinous crimes that have no basis in fact, well, would you be offended? What if they just cast aspersions on your character, insinuating that some of the good things you've done had dark, ulterior motives? Would you be outraged? If you wouldn't be, then I'd recommend you to see a therapist. So, here in Job, put yourself in God's shoes, as if that

were possible, and consider how God felt when Job's friends so misrepresented God's character, His love and goodness. Job's friends didn't know anything about why Job had been so blessed before and now why he was in such painful, dire circumstances. At the very least, by their wild imaginings they cast aspersions on God's character. Job 42:7 quotes God: 'After the Lord had finished speaking to Job, He said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about Me, as My servant Job has".' Do you begin to grasp what a big deal, terrifying deal, it is to misrepresent God?

As loyal followers of Christ Jesus, as genuine, true "Christians", which means "little Christs", we are to be His representatives, and His representation in this world, for as long as we shall live on the face of this earth. We are literally His "ambassadors", as Paul terms us in II Corinthians 5. As God's ambassadors, shouldn't we look and act the part? True, it can be hard sometimes, particularly if someone deliberately and unjustly accuses us of one thing or another. In such cases, how are we to respond? Well, how did God respond? He asked Job's friends to bring sacrifices, which Job, as a type of priest, offered on their behalf. And then God forgave them. Which obviously means that we're also to forgive those who defame us. We forgive and continue to share the loving truth of God to them, always being the best representation and representative of the One and Only Savior of the World. Holy Spirit will help you do it and be it. Keep asking Him.

