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Reading the Old Testament

Reflection Paper- Job

Job deals with one of the most interesting questions in light of the entire narrative of the Bible. “Why do the righteous suffer?” and although this is not addressed directly in the story of Job, there are many things are revealed about the character of man, of God and our relationship with Him. Parallel stories similar to the storyline of Job exist in the Babylonian/Mesopotamian literature. With the story of Job, the reader is introduced to a new idea, a more complete idea of who God is in relation to us. The book of Job teaches that while the wicked are not the only ones who suffer, the righteous are the ones who are intimately loved and acknowledged by God. Other key ideas include the fact that God’s justice is not something that can be simplified to be understood by man’s finite knowledge. It is not an equation or formula that can be understood by the retribution principle. God’s justice and God’s wisdom go hand in hand. What man may understand to be just is limited and subjective while God’s justice has the bigger picture at hand because His wisdom is unlimited and infinite. All of these topics are gone over through the book of Job but what is perhaps most interesting about Job is the fact that although God’s wisdom and justice may be incomprehensible, His attributes and character of being a loving, merciful, patient, and forgiving God stands true.

Up until the book of Job, it can be inferred true that man’s relationship with God is based on a retribution principle. However, such an assumption can be totally thrown out the window when the book of Job introduces the main character as a man who is righteous, shuns evil and

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loves God in an unadulterated way. Parallel stories that share the same genre as the book of Job all depict a sufferer who is deserving of or accepts the fact that undeserved suffering does not exist. However, with the book of Job the main theme is that it is not just the wicked who suffer and the righteous who are prosperous. As the Gospel of Matthew states, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (5:45). Therefore, God shows no partiality in His blessings and curses, however, this raises questions of our Lord’s justice, which the book of Job explores and enlightens readers on.

The questions against God’s righteousness are not so much a lesson told through the story as it is an actual question that is literally introduced by Satan within the first couple chapters of the book. In chapter 1 verse 9-11, Satan implies through his conversation with God that His *retribution principle* is not conducive to producing true and genuine righteousness. Satan’s underlying argument in his accusation of Job is that righteous men like him are only righteous in order to gain blessing from God in return. It is undisputable that Job is a righteous man, at least from what is emphasized by the narrator. Perhaps because this is the case, when Job is still proved righteous even through suffering, he “vindicates God’s policy of blessing righteous people by maintaining his integrity even when he is not being blessed for it” (Wright 408). Despite, Job’s abstinence from explicit sin, what is proven at the end of the narrative is that the blessings of God is upheld not by man’s righteous display before their Creator but rather, by God himself towards His righteous people through love by a method of infinite wisdom

On a surface level, the Old Testament God can seem only as a wrathful, righteous Judge which He is. However, in its entirety, from the Old Testament to the New, what unfolds is God’s Retribution Principle- The rewards or punishments appended to the legislation of Yahweh’s pact with Israel stipulate that obedience to the commands of God will bring divine blessing, where as disobedience to the Lord’s statutes will send the curses of Yahweh upon the Hebrews.

redemptive plan for His people on both a micro and macrocosmic scale. In this way, the book of Job ties into the overall purpose of the Old Testament which is to build up to foreshadow Christ. Job although a man, can be seen as well as a typology of Christ because he is a righteous sufferer, a mediator of his people, and also acknowledged by God in a personal and intimate way. The Old Testament is a story of many lessons told through accounts of Hebrews and Israelites in order to prepare mankind for the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah in the New Testament. Since the fall of humankind in the story of Genesis chapter 3, God begins a redemptive plan for His creation from sin. Amongst all of the human population, God chooses the Hebrews and makes from them a nation through the patriarch Abraham which eventually leads to the root of David who is Jesus Christ.

The overarching theme of the Old Testament introduces God's attributes. Everything about His justice, wisdom, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence is introduced in the Old Testament. The role that the book of Job plays is one where it introduces the attributes of God to the reader in a deeper way. In regards to God's justice and sovereignty, without the book of Job, the *Retribution Principle* may have been the only lens through which God's justice could have been understood. In fact, this is how Job's three friends understand the attributes of God as well when they fail to console Job in teaching him and goading him to repent of "hidden sin". It can be argued whether God's retribution principle stands true but what is definite is that the righteous are not necessarily awarded by prosperity or blessing but instead, by an intimate and personal revelation of God's acknowledgement. The book of Job takes God's attributes of sovereignty and justice and makes sure that they are not something that can be simplified down to an equation that man can take advantage of. This in turn, ties in with the overall shape of the Old Testament because God's redemptive plan under His sovereignty is a Retribution Principle- The rewards or punishments appended to the legislation of Yahweh's pact with Israel stipulate that obedience to the commands of God will bring divine blessing, where as disobedience to the Lord's statutes will send the curses of Yahweh upon the Hebrews.

“mystery”, a “secret” that angels desire to look into and prophets and kings wanted to hear. (1 Peter 1:12, Matthew 13:17). Although God’s love for mankind is evident, it is not just righteous that experience it. It is rather the ones who *love* the Lord who experience God in full.

When Job loses family, reputation, wealth and health. Many of his friends come and under the guise of comforting him actually accuse him of unconfessed or hidden sins. This is interesting because when God actually appears, Job is the only one who is accepted by the Lord while the other 3 friends must be atoned for through Job’s sacrifice. This redemptive act of Job and also him acting as a mediator is fully developed in the New Testament through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of the Fall, mankind loses their standing as the reflection of the image of God. This fall has byproducts which pervade all of existence as a whole. Likewise, with Job when he loses his standing amongst the elders, youth, friends and even his own wife it is none other than God who redeems Him and in turn, Job redeems his friends. At the end of the book, when God appears to Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, His judgement is against not the afflicted Job but against the wrongfully accusatory friends. When Jesus Christ comes onto the scene although the roles are slightly different, it is again God who redeems mankind and God who acts as a consistent mediator between humanity’s sin and God’s own justice.

A practical theme of the book of Job is definitely loyalty. I think loyalty or allegiance is the correct word to describe the practical theme of the book of Job because it is first loyalty and allegiance which leads Job to a deeper love for God. Additionally, not only does Job’s loyalty and allegiance to a deeper love for God but it brings him to a place of deeper understanding of who God is (Job 42:5). The New Testament describes the believer as a sheep, a steward, a servant, a son or daughter and also as a soldier. These words describe the believers’ relationship

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with God and although different words are used to describe Christians in the world differently throughout history, as a soldier of Christ what is necessary is loyalty. Job displays loyalty and allegiance to His God in spite of Satan's attacks, his friends' accusations, and his wife's betrayal. Job's loyalty and allegiance to YHWH does not lead to the satisfaction of his curiosity but he gains something more valuable in the process. In the modern day, the church will speak of forgiveness without repentance, faith without trust, and love without commitment. Job's commitment to the God he has heard of is what leads to his witnessing of Him with his own eyes. When Job witnesses God for himself, his understanding of God's greatness trumps all curiosity he had previously about God's justice, sovereignty, and wisdom.

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