

# SONS OF ADAM

Studies of Old Testament Characters in New Testament Light

by

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## CHAPTER SIX

### Noah, Daniel and Job: Three Righteous Men

THERE IS a strange text on intercessory prayer in the prophecy of Ezekiel. It links together three men in strange order and the words are repeated three times in the same chapter (14:14, 16, 20).

**"Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God."**

The chapter tells of GOD's day of doom for unrepentant Israel. So grievous was their sin that their very land was defiled and GOD threatened to **"break the staff of the bread thereof"** and to **"send famine upon it,"** and **"cut off man and beast from it."**

There was no hope of intercession left.

And then Ezekiel, inspired of GOD, chooses from the long record of divine history three men, righteous men who would not even by their presence or by their prayers be able to redeem Israel from its impending doom. What a strange choice - Noah, Daniel, and Job!

- Noah, who survived the flood but could not stay it; who walked with GOD and yet fell into grievous sin!
- Daniel, the greatly beloved prophet of the exile who preached to Nebuchadnezzar but could not prevent the destruction of Babylon!
- Job, an example of patience who sinned not in his words, who prayed for his friends and offered sacrifice, yet could not solve the problem of the righteous man doomed to suffer!

This verse (of triplet heroes who lived ages apart) has been a puzzle and bewilderment to the critics who have tried to make the middle link a missing link and Daniel a mythical figure. Noah is lost in antediluvian mists because of the flood story and the big ark, while Job was a fictional figure, the hero of an old poem!

It is they who tell us; in the Encyclopedia Britannica:

"The book of Daniel is not a record of historical fact but in its first half is an edifying romance and in its latter half a typical apocalypse written about 200 B.C."

"Daniel is known to us only as a character in Jewish fiction" (C. C. Torrey). But the very Daniel who escapes half alive from the critics' den is the same Daniel whose prayer was heard in the lion's den and whose prophecies are quoted by our Saviour as genuine and certain of fulfillment (Matthew 24: 15).

The book of Daniel is a book of intercession as well as a book of prophecy.

Ezekiel was older than, and yet a contemporary of, Daniel (if we follow the conservative interpretation), but he puts him with antediluvian Noah and with the patriarch Job. The three are linked together as historic characters.

Was Daniel already a spiritual celebrity when Ezekiel wrote his prophecy? What had these men in common? Why are they called men of righteousness, examples of perfection? When we begin to ask questions such as these and to think, then the Bible unfolds its riches.

There is nothing accidental or grotesque in the association of such names.

They are cited as examples of men who, because they were righteous were also mighty in prayer before a righteous and holy GOD. Even if such men pray for others they are not always sure of their own will being in accord with GOD's purpose. There is an end to intercession, as we have seen, in the prayer of Abraham for Sodom. GOD's mercy is everlasting but His righteousness and judgment are also part of His very being. There is such a thing even in the New Testament as "**the wrath of the Lamb**" and the day of final judgment and punishment.

A guest at Luther's table once asked the Doctor whether there was not some discrepancy between the words of Ezekiel in this passage and the saying of the Lord to Abraham in Genesis 18: 32, "**I will not destroy it for ten's sake.**"

Luther replied:

"There is no discrepancy. The explanation is that in Ezekiel these men were forbidden to pray, and this was not the case with Abraham. If GOD says, 'You shalt not pray,' one may well cease . . . I should long ago have given up praying against the Turk if I had had a command; but since I have not got it, I must go on praying."

So we must continue to pray for Israel today.

There is no reference by Ezekiel to Abraham nor to Moses, the great intercessors.

He goes further afield and speaks of Noah who found favor with GOD (Genesis 6:8);

- Who was a righteous man (Genesis 7:1);
- Who walked with GOD and was perfect in his generation (Hebrews 11:7);
- Who was, however, conscious of his sin when he built an altar and received the rainbow of promise; the same rainbow that is round about the throne of GOD and the Lamb.

By faith, being warned of GOD concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, he prepared an ark, condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness according to faith. He saw the destruction of a whole generation by the flood. He walked with GOD (although he stumbled into sin) and his name is forever enrolled in the New Testament as a hero of faith.

The significance of the rainbow which GOD spanned over Noah's altar of prayer as a perpetual promise (Genesis 9:13) is lost unless we put ourselves back to the age of the patriarchs.

As Henry Vaughan puts it:

"How bright wert thou, when Shem's admiring eye  
Thy burnisht, flaming Arch did first descry!  
When Terah, Nahor, Haran, Abram, Lot,  
The youthful world's grey fathers in one knot,  
Did with intente looks watch every hour  
For thy new light, and trembled at each shower!" [1]

The rainbow is a constant reminder of Noah as a man of prayer!

Daniel is called the "**greatly beloved**" by GOD Himself (9:23; 10:11, 19). He was a man of vision and of dauntless courage who dared to stand alone. He had purpose firm and prayed three times daily on his knees, toward the Holy City, when in exile.

Tennyson wrote to one of his friends:

"Pusey's '*Daniel the Prophet*' disposes of the rickety and crotchety arguments of those who vainly thought they had found a fulcrum whereby to upheave all prophecy and miracle. It is a noble book from its learning and its logic. It is reading round about a subject and not the subject itself which damages the intellect so much." [2]

Matthew Henry says that Ezekiel chose Daniel as the link between Noah and Job

"to teach us not to lessen the useful good men of our day by overmagnifying the ancients. Let the children of the captivity know that Daniel, their neighbor, and companion in tribulation, being a man of great humility, piety, and zeal for GOD, and instant and constant in prayer, had as good an interest in heaven as Noah or Job had."

The third righteous man was Job, a perfect man and upright, one that feared GOD and eschewed [turned away] from evil (Job 1:1,8; 42:8,9); a rich man who became very unhappy; a very lonely man who, deserted by his friends and his own wife, kept his faith and cried, "**I know that my Redeemer liveth.**"

The order of the names is not chronological nor intended to teach history - Noah, Daniel, Job. But it teaches the deeper lesson of answered and unanswered prayer.

They point out the limits of the realm of intercession. The glorious climax of the book of Job is answered prayer. "**And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before . . . So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning . . . So Job died, being old and full of years**" (Job 42:10, 12, 17).

All three of these men Ezekiel calls "**righteous**" in the Old Testament sense.

It was in every case, as Paul tells us, a righteousness of faith. They believed GOD and it was counted unto them for righteousness; they confessed their own sinfulness and unworthiness. In the words of the gospel, "**they saw Christ's day and were glad.**" They were saved by faith.

Each interceded for others and faced the problem of "the moral man in immoral society" long before Reinhold Niebuhr tried his solution.

- In the Old Testament, suffering is a problem;
- In the New Testament, Paul and others speak of it as a privilege.

Even the Israel of Ezekiel's day found mercy at the last. The remnant was saved and GOD's covenant promise for them still stands.

Finally, each of these three men spoke by word and deed of the Great Deliverer.

Noah's ark is a type of CHRIST and the Church.

Noah's prophecy (Genesis 9:26,27) points to Shem as the line of promise for the future Redeemer. "**Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.**" What an epitome of history in a sentence!

Job's longing for a Daysman to judge his cause and his triumphant cry, "**I know that my Redeemer liveth,**" has been immortalized in Handel's Messiah and will be sung down the ages on Easter Day in spite of all efforts to emasculate its meaning by criticism of the text.

And who can read the glorious promises in the last chapter of Daniel without a thrill for the general Resurrection and the Great Day of reward.

These three men individually are examples to believers to the end of time.

- Noah for his strong faith,
- Daniel for his dauntless courage and
- Job for patience in suffering.

Take one example from Thomas Carlyle's Letters. After the death of Emerson's little son, we are told that the Scottish philosopher wrote to his American friend:

"What can we say in these cases? There is nothing to be said - nothing but what the wild son of Ishmael, and every thinking heart, from of old have learned to say: GOD is great! He is terrible and stern; but we know also He is good. **Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.**' Your bright little boy, chief of your possessions here below, is wrapt away from you; but of very truth he is with GOD, even as we that yet live are - and surely in the way that was best for him, and for you, and for all of us."

In this way Job's tears are our legacy of joy and his faith cheers Carlyle and Handel and all of us.

"In the hour of trial  
Jesus pray for me,  
Lest by base denial  
I depart from Thee."

"When Thou seest me waver  
With a look recall,  
Not for fear or favor  
Suffer me to fall."

Amen.

1 Stoddard, *The Old Testament in Life and Literature*, p. 44.

2 *Tennyson and his Friends*, p. 64.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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