



## Bring the books...

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

*Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* by Rev. Ron Hanko (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2020). \$19.95 hard cover. 160 pp. Reviewed by Rev. Joe Holstege.



The children of God suffer. Some of them suffer more than others, but all of them suffer. They suffer as they pass through life in a fallen world. They suffer from trouble in their families and distress in their marriages. They suffer upheaval in the world and disruption in the church. They suffer persecution and injustice at the hands of men. They suffer beside quiet sickbeds or still coffins.

The glory of God's Word is that it does not remain silent on the sidelines as the children of God suffer. The Word of God speaks to that suffering in ways no other word either can or may. Perhaps there is no greater example of this speech of God to the suffering saints than what we find in the book of Job. Scripture itself commends this book and its namesake character to the child of God who finds himself grappling with suffering in his own life. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job..." (James 5:11).

Yet the book of Job is challenging. A young child can grasp the basic storyline of Job's prosperity, his suffering, and his ultimate correction and restoration

in a thirty-minute catechism lesson. However, a beginner's catechism lesson rarely delves too deeply into the three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends that make up the main part of the book. Even a seasoned Christian can quickly find himself lost in the many poetic turns of phrase and deep questions raised by the six speakers from Job 4-41.

The great value of Rev. Ron Hanko's new commentary on Job is that it makes this large and challenging book of the Bible accessible. *Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* is purposely inexhaustive when it comes to a word-for-word breakdown. "That would require too much space, would almost certainly be repetitious, and would obscure the main purpose of the book" (p. xi). A glance at the table of contents will help you keep your bearings by making the basic form and structure of the book visible. The commentary itself then works through each of these main sections, keeping the focus on the main points and how they develop and build on one another. The assumption of the author is clearly that you

will have your Bible open on your lap as you use this book as a guide into its main themes and applications.

What the book lacks in detail, however, it makes up in focus on the big picture. The great concern of Rev. Hanko is clearly that God would speak through His book of Job, and that God's people would hear God's Word about their suffering. Some of the things spoken by Job or his three friends may, in fact, be wrong in their content, emphasis, or application. But that does not take away from the inspiration of the book of Job as a whole. "More, it is God's final word on the matter" (p. ix). Following the lead of the biblical text, the commentary therefore carries us along through the cycles of speeches to the great conclusion of the matter when the Lord Himself descends in the whirlwind. I have never before experienced the hair of my arms standing on end when reading a commentary on the Bible, but I have also never realized what a striking scene it must have been as Elihu was speaking his last words, even as clouds were gathering on the dark horizon and the winds picking up. "From the storm God speaks, and if the storm were not enough to silence every mouth, God holds before his servant Job his unspeakable and incomprehensible glory as creator and upholder of all things" (p. 125). Where Job has been looking for a meeting with God in order to demand an explanation for his suffering, "getting what he wished, Job finds he has nothing to say" (p. 125).

That focus on the big themes of the book enables the author to make many warm and instructive applications along the way. From instruction on how *not* to comfort a brother in the church (hint: *not* like Job's three miserable friends), to highlighting the *limits* with which a believer

may question God as he suffers, the commentary brings the main message of the book of Job to bear on the lives of God's people. The great lesson that Job, his friends, and we need to learn is "that God is the great redeemer of his people, not in spite of their trials and afflictions, but in their trials and afflictions" (p. 128). Thus, the title of the book, which calls attention to the distinctive light the sovereignty of God brings upon the reality of Christian suffering.

*Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering* could be used profitably by any Christian who desires to work through the book of Job in his or her own personal devotions. As you keep the biblical text open on your lap, the commentary will keep you from losing sight of the big picture and the main applications. I also kept thinking to myself as I read the book, that it would serve as a helpful tool for a Bible study group. Maybe Bible study groups tend to stay away from Job, given its length and complexity. The commentary may help a study group work through the biblical text in a reasonable amount of time (keeping to the main sections, rather than individual chapters) while enabling fruitful discussion on the main questions raised and answered in the book of Job.

The children of God suffer. Of that, there can be no doubt. The question is not whether we will suffer. The question is, where will we turn for comfort and instruction in the midst of our sufferings? The answer to that question for the Christian can only be, to the Word of God; and in particular, to the Word of God in the book of Job. May the Lord use this new commentary to aid the children of God as they seek such comfort and instruction in the midst of all their sufferings.