

CHAPTER III

THE PROLOGUE

THERE was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. ²And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. ³His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred sheasses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the children of the east. ⁴And his sons went and held a feast in the house of each one upon his day; and they sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. ⁵And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and renounced God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. ⁷And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. ⁸And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil. ⁹Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? ¹⁰Hast

not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath, on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. ¹¹But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will renounce thee to thy face. ¹²And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. ¹³ And it fell on a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, ¹⁴that there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: ¹⁵and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ¹⁶While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ¹⁷While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have taken them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. ¹⁸While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: ¹⁹and, behold, there came a great wind from the

wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

20. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped; ²¹and he said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. ²²In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with foolishness.

2. Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. ²And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. ³And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the

earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil: and he still holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. ⁴And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. ⁵But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face. ⁶And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; only spare his life. ⁷So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. ⁸And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat among the ashes. ⁹Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? renounce God, and die. ¹⁰But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.

IN HEAVEN

HOWEVER familiar the opening scene of Job may be, there seem to be few who take it seriously. Most Christian depictions of Satan are entirely incompatible with what we are here told. We see Satan coming into the presence of God, and though it is not expressly stated, it is a fair inference that it was his duty so to do. What particular role he plays in the sovereign purposes of God is not made clear, though he goes up and down the world seeking whom he may accuse. But the vital point is that he is a servant of God, albeit an unwilling one. When in rabbinic tradition the personal name Sammael is given him with the office of angel of death, it is, of course, pure fancy, but the underlying principle is true.

The attitude of the liberal scholar tends to be that here we have a relatively primitive and outmoded conception of the Accuser (the meaning of Satan, which is a title, not a proper name). The more conservative scholar is apt to think that he need take only New Testament passages into consideration.

We must first of all remember that we cannot dismiss this picture as merely the expression of an old popular legend. Zech. 3: 1f and I Chron. 21: 1, the other two passages in the Old Testament where Satan is mentioned by name, express an identical outlook, as do Judges 9: 23, I Sam. 16: 14, 18: 10, 19: 9, I Kings 22: 19-23.

We must further bear in mind that the New Testament writers were familiar with the teaching of the Old and based themselves upon it. Even where they carried it further, they were affirming its truth. If then from the New Testament we have inferred views about the role and power of Satan which are in contradiction to the picture in *Job*, it means that by ignoring the Old Testament we have misunderstood the New.

It is not unfair to say that the vast majority of Christians either fly in the face of revelation and experience and deny the existence of Satan, or attribute to him such wide-reaching power and authority as to become virtual dualists in their religion. The teaching of Scripture is clear that nothing exists without God's will and permission. All power and authority are derived from Him. Whatever the position and power of Satan, he is God's creation, his power is derived from God, and willingly or unwillingly he is working out God's purposes. This is clearly seen in his conversation with God about Job.

It is usual to explain Job's sufferings by the malignity of Satan, but this is obviously false. Satan cannot even mention Job, for he has no accusation against him, until God invites him to do so (1: 8, 2: 3). Equally he has no power over Job or his possessions until God gives it him. So it is clear that, while God uses Satan's malignity, the origin of Job's sufferings goes back to God Himself, and no explanation of God's action is ever offered.

The fact that Satan is a fallen angel and in rebellion against God does not give to him any power at all except such as God chooses to give him. He is not sovereign in a rival kingdom, but a rebel to whom God gives as much rope as will glorify His own name.

Satan's fundamentally subservient role in the whole story is born out by his non-mention in the epilogue. Having carried out his task in stripping Job of wealth and health and in rousing Job's fellow-townspeople against him, he can be dismissed as of no further interest in the development of the story.

ON EARTH

The ease and speed with which all Job's wealth and happiness vanished once Satan was allowed to touch them should be to us not merely a reminder that the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them, but also that it is God who rules in the affairs of men, and that He mercifully restrains the power of evil. We should be so concerned with the power of God, that the power entrusted to Satan will seem very small in comparison.

The pious Christian might have seen the hand of Satan in his loss and have prayed that he might be restrained. Probably more wisely, Job recognized the sovereignty of God. We are told that he did not charge God "with foolishness" (1: 22), but this is hardly an adequate translation, while "with wrong" (R.S.V.) is too strong. The Hebrew means "insipidity" or "unseemliness" (Koehler). It means that he did not consider that God had acted out of character; the I.C.C. is correct with "unworthiness."

There can be no certainty as to the nature of the disease with which Job was smitten. It may have been elephantiasis, a form of leprosy, or one of various oriental diseases proposed by doctors familiar with the Near East, or even smallpox, as recently suggested by Dr. Rendle Short.* It was not so much the pain of the disease that prostrated Job; it is referred to comparatively little in the speeches, and Stevenson, pp. 34ff, shows that in fact it may not be mentioned at all in them. It was that it had made him unclean, an outcast who found his resting place on the rubbish-mound outside the town gate. Though it is not stated in as many words, it is clear that Job's choice of the dung-hill (*the ashes*, 2: 8) outside the gate is not an expression of his despair, but it had been forced upon him because he had been thrust out by his fellow-townsmen.

Wetzstein writes in Delitzsch's *The Book of Job* about the dung-hills of the Hauran villages, now called *mezbele*:

"The dung . . . is carried in baskets in a dry state to that place outside the village, and there generally it is burnt once a month. . . . If a place has been inhabited for centuries, the *mezbele* attains a height far greater than that of the place itself. The rains of winter reduce the layers of ashes to a compact

* *The Bible and Modern Medicine*, p. 53f.

mass, and gradually convert the *mezbele* into a solid hill of earth. . . . There lies the outcast who, smitten by loathsome disease, is no longer admitted to the dwellings of men. . . . There lie the dogs of the village, gnawing perhaps some fallen carcase, such as is often thrown there."

For Job's contemporaries, as for the inhabitants of the Near East in general and for Israel in particular for many centuries to come, a man's prosperity or adversity, his health or sickness, were regarded as the verdict of heaven on his conduct. Job himself believed this, and this belief lies in one form or another behind all the arguments of his friends. The sting of this spiritual pain, of the belief that he was cast off by God, hurt far more than any physical suffering. But there was more to it than this. To be shut out of the fellowship of one's community was much worse. So great was the feeling of "corporate personality" that it was not till the spiritual victory of Jeremiah that men could realize that a man might be in fellowship with God even if he were cut off from his community. This explains the advice of Job's wife (2: 9). For her Job is as good as dead already, for he is not only ill, but cut off from God. For him to curse God and so bring swift and merciful relief in God's blasting death-stroke could not worsen his relationship to God. We can see the inner reality of Job's faith in that he does not allow his outward circumstances to overwhelm the inner witness of the Spirit within him. Though he cannot understand the reasons for his sufferings, he does not believe that God has cast him out. It should be noted that *in all this did not Job sin with his lips* does not imply in Hebrew, as it might well be construed in English, that Job sinned in his unspoken thoughts.

11. Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: and they made an appointment together to come to bemoan him and to comfort him. ¹²And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him

not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. ¹³So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

We should not minimize the friendship of the three who came a long distance to comfort him. Although men of wealth and

worth, they were not ashamed to associate with the outcast on the rubbish-mound. But fundamentally they had accepted without question the verdict of the men of his own town. The seven days and nights they sat with him (2: 13) are the period of mourning for the dead (cf. Gen. 50: 10, I Sam. 31: 13). In the name of friendship they tried to hide their convictions about Job, until he drove them to speak openly, but all their efforts at comfort were vitiated by their fundamental presupposition. Nothing ties us more readily than inherited superstitions.