

Job 10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Job chapter 10. I loathe my life. I will give free utterance to my complaint. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, do not condemn me. Let me know why you contend against me.

Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands, and favour the designs of the wicked? Have you eyes of flesh? Do you see as man sees? Are your days as the days of man, or your years as a man's years?

That you seek out my iniquity, and search for my sin, although you know that I am not guilty, and there is none to deliver out of your hand. Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether.

Remember that you have made me like clay, and will you return me to the dust? Did you not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews.

You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit. Yet these things you hid in your heart. I know that this was your purpose. If I sin, you watch me, and do not acquit me of my iniquity.

[1 : 11] If I am guilty, woe to me, if I am in the right. I cannot lift up my head, for I am filled with disgrace, and look on my affliction. And were my head lifted up, you would hunt me like a lion, and again work wonders against me.

You renew your witnesses against me, and increase your vexation toward me. You bring fresh troops against me. Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave.

Are not my days few? Then cease, and leave me alone, that I may find a little cheer, before I go, and I shall not return. To the land of darkness, and deep shadow, the land of gloom like thick darkness, like deep shadow, without any order, where light is as thick darkness.

In Job chapter 10, Job concludes the response to Bildad the Shuhite's first speech to him. However, by the point of chapter 10, he is almost entirely addressing God.

He asks God to cease holding him guilty, as he clearly has been holding him guilty in his judgments of him to this point. He appeals to God, as if God were a man, to tell him why he has a case against him.

[2 : 27] What issue does God have with Job? He puzzles over the motives of God. Does God simply have no care for his creations? Perhaps God handles mankind like a petulant child destroys his playthings.

Does God derive some pleasure or satisfaction from oppression? Is God just limited in his vision, like a human being might be, perhaps not perceiving the truth of the situation? Is God merely a mortal of short lifespan, who is in some hurry to pursue and punish Job's sin, lest Job outlive him?

To ask such questions is instantly to rule them out. But if such explanations be ruled out, what is Job to make of God's motivations in his suffering? The Lord seems determined to find Job guilty, but Job is not guilty.

And so Job seems doomed to be in the hands of a God who is in a futile quest to find some grievous fault in him when there is none. In Psalm 139, verses 13 to 16, the psalmist describes his formation in the womb.

For you form my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, my soul knows it very well.

[3 : 36] My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Here, in verses 8 to 12, Job describes his formation by God in the womb. He speaks of how, as a human being, he was formed from the clay. With the image of being poured out like milk and curdle like cheese, Job seems to have in mind the earliest formation of the child in the womb, the insemination of the womb, and the early growth of the embryo.

Following that is his clothed with skin and flesh, knit together with bones and sinews. Prior to the advent of modern imaging technology, this vision of the human person being formed in the womb is a wonderful one, describing the miraculous, marvellous and mysterious origins of the human body.

To his initial formation of Job's body, God added his gift of life and the steadfast love that preserved Job and his existence. Yet this all takes an ugly form.

These great wonders of God, done in the formation and preservation of Job, seem to have been undertaken for some sadistic purpose. Job has been created merely in order that he might be destroyed.

[4 : 50] God has undertaken so much care in fashioning Job from the dust, merely to return him to the dust. Job's words here are understandably bitter. Even though they are not his last words or the full expression of his spirit and its different contrary feelings, they are nonetheless deeply and painfully felt.

Is it merely the case that all of the grace that he has received from the Lord's hand is but a mask for a hostile intention? Is God merely like the accuser, looking for some grounds upon which to persecute Job?

His watch over Job is not the watch of preservation, but a watch designed to find fault and to excuse hostile treatment. However, given the settled nature of God's hostile intent towards him, Job feels that even if he did assert his innocence, the Lord would bring shame upon him nonetheless.

The Lord is like a lion seeking to devour Job. He has already worked his wonders against Job with the great mighty wind and more particularly with the fire of God that came down from heaven.

His boils might also be related to a striking with leprosy, a signal affliction that on several occasions in scripture is seen as something that comes as a mark of divine judgment.

[5 : 58] The disasters that befell Job could not merely be attributed to chance, besides the fact that the odds would be astronomical. They had the fingerprints of God all over them. It is unmistakable.

God has clearly set himself as Job's enemy. This is a settled disposition of hostility on God's part, and Job feels utterly powerless to change it. Job concludes his speech, picking up some of the themes of his initial curse and lament from chapter 3.

He asks God why he brought him out of the womb. Why not simply allow him to die in there? As he's argued before, he's a mortal with a short lifespan. Why should the Lord be so concerned with punishing him when he will soon pass away in death?

If the Lord would simply leave him alone, he might enjoy just a bit of relief. Faced with the prospect of continuing to be a creature in the hands of a callous God, Job longs for the state of decreation or uncreation.

For a return to that primordial state that preceded the original word of God in creation, enveloped in that darkness and dissolved into that chaos, Job might finally enjoy some relief in oblivion.

[7 : 03] A question to consider, what are some examples of places in scripture where God comes as an enemy to the righteous?