

Job 13: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [0 : 0 0] Job chapter 13. Behold, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it. What you know, I also know. I am not inferior to you. But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God. As for you, you whitewash with lies.
- Worthless physicians are you all. Oh, that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom. Hear now my argument, and listen to the pleadings of my lips. Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for him? Will you show partiality toward him?
- Will you plead the case for God? Will it be well with you when he searches you out? Or can you deceive him as one deceives a man? He will surely rebuke you, if in secret you show partiality.
- Will not his majesty terrify you, and the dread of him fall upon you? Your maxims are proverbs of ashes. Your defences are defences of clay. Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may.
- Why should I take flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand? Though he slay me, I will hope in him, yet I will argue my ways to his face. This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him.
- [1 : 1 7] Keep listening to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears. Behold, I have prepared my case. I know that I shall be in the right. Who is there who will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die.
- Only grant me two things, then I will not hide myself from your face. Withdraw your hand far from me, and let not dread of you terrify me. Then call, and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply to me.
- How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy? Will you frighten a driven leaf, and pursue dry chaff?
- For you write bitter things against me, and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks, and watch all my paths. You set a limit for the soles of my feet.
- Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten. Job chapter 13 continues the speech of Job that concludes the first cycles of dialogues.
- [2 : 2 1] It marks a decisive turn in Job's position. Job had formerly lamented the impossibility of effectively making a case with God. In chapter 9 verses 2 and 3 he had said, Truly I know that it is so, but how can a man be in the right before God?
- If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. And in verses 14 to 20 of that chapter, How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him?
- Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him. I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice.

For he crushes me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness. If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty.

If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me. Though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. However, in this chapter, Job turns to advance just such a legal case with God.

[3 : 27] He is prepared to risk everything in such an endeavour. The opening five verses of this chapter, with chapter 12 verses 2 to 4, bookend Job's opening challenge to his friends, and the ironic doxology on the inscrutable and dread wisdom of God at the end of the preceding chapter.

Job appeals to first-hand wisdom, which trumps the wisdom that his friends have to offer. His statement in verse 2, What you know I also know, I am not inferior to you, picks up the words of chapter 12 verse 3, But I have understanding as well as you, I am not inferior to you.

Who does not know such things as these? Norman Harbell reads verse 4 of the preceding chapter, While Job had earlier appealed against God's judgment, now he does so more formally and directly.

He calls out to a higher court than that of the friends, wanting to argue his case with God himself, wanting to arraign the Almighty. He presents a sharp and scathing dismissal of his friends.

They've covered up the truth like whitewash. They've offered no remedy or solve for his distress. He wishes that the friends would remain silent. If they would only do so, they would be more wise than they were in speaking out in a situation they did not understand.

[4 : 51] Proverbs chapter 17 verse 28 speaks of such situations. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise. When he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

By speaking out, Job's friends had only displayed their ignorance, their inability to understand the true nature of his situation. The friends had presumed to speak on God's behalf.

They seek to justify God and to condemn Job. In taking God's side of the matter, they presume that they cannot be gainsaid by anyone. However, Job attacks that assumption.

Although they are trying to speak on God's behalf, they are doing so in a way that is unrighteous. With lies, they are showing partiality. What will become of them when God shows up to inspect the case and to test their words?

The words of the friends are worthless, and when the Lord searches them out, they will be exposed as such. They will be rebuked by him, and his majesty will terrify them. Though they may claim an ancient pedigree, Job describes their maxims as proverbs of ashes, and their arguments on God's behalf as defences of clay.

[5 : 55] In summoning the Lord for a hearing, Job is taking his life in his own hands. Yet he is prepared to take the risk. God may indeed slay him, but what does he have to lose?

He isn't holding out any great hope, but this will be the course that he will take. Rather than suffering the dread and inscrutable providences of a God veiled in darkness, Job would deal with God face to face.

The beginning of verse 15 has been famously translated as, Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. However, it is more likely to be properly read as a statement that the Lord may indeed kill him, and that he isn't holding out much hope.

The one thread that Job holds onto for his assurance is his own innocence. It is this that leads him to seek a showdown with God. A guilty man would not seek God's face in such a manner.

While his own case is a strong one, Job still has misgivings. He had earlier expressed in chapter 9 the way that the Lord could just overwhelm him with his majesty. At the end of chapter 9 in verses 33 to 35 he had said, There is no arbiter between us who might lay his hand on us both.

[7 : 02] Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself. This fear of divine intimidation makes it very difficult for Job to approach the Lord face to face.

He asked the Lord in verses 20 and 21 that he would restrain his dread and his terror so that Job could actually deal with him directly. In such an encounter, it could go either way.

The Lord could present his case against Job, and Job could answer, or Job could present his concerns to the Lord, and the Lord could answer him. In verse 23 we see that Job presumes that the Lord will address him, with the Lord playing the part of the plaintiff.

Rather than inflicting the Kafkaesque judgments that Job had experienced, Job wants God to come out into the open, to present his charge against Job formally and explicitly.

He desires God to express why he has been judging him in the way that he has. Why is God so battering with his judgments a mere mortal? Is he judging Job for the inadvertent sins of his youth?

[8 : 04] God is treating Job like an oppressor would treat his adversary, not giving him a fair trial, but inflicting all sorts of punishments upon him. Scholars differ about where to situate verse 28.

Should it be read with the verse that follows at the beginning of chapter 14, man who is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers.

He flees like a shadow and continues not. However, it might also be read in parallel with verse 25, Will you frighten a driven leaf and pursue dry chaff?

Faced with the cruel and heavy hand of the Lord, Job is asking God why he is concentrating such anger upon a mean and small and feeble creature. A question to consider.

Some scholars have heard an allusion to verse 16 of this chapter, in Philippians chapter 1 verses 18 to 20. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

[9 : 03] And in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death.

How might Paul be working with the background of the book of Job with this statement in its context?