



## Job - Chapter Thirteen

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### Summary of Chapter Thirteen

Job defends himself against the accusations of his friends, and accuses them of endeavouring to pervert truth (vv.1-8), threatens them with God's judgements (vv.9-12), and then begs some respite and expresses strong confidence in God (vv.13-19). Finally, Job pleads with God, and deplores his severe trials and sufferings (vv.20-28).

- 1 'Look, my eye has seen all this,  
my ear has heard and understood it.
- 2 What you know, I also know;  
I am not inferior to you.
- 3 But I would speak to the Almighty,  
and I desire to argue my case with God.
- 4 As for you, you whitewash with lies;

all of you are worthless physicians.  
5 If you would only keep silent,  
that would be your wisdom!  
6 Hear now my reasoning,  
and listen to the pleadings of my lips.  
7 Will you speak falsely for God,  
and speak deceitfully for him?  
8 Will you show partiality towards him,  
will you plead the case for God?  
9 Will it be well with you when he searches you out?  
Or can you deceive him, as one person deceives another?  
10 He will surely rebuke you  
if in secret you show partiality.  
11 Will not his majesty terrify you,  
and the dread of him fall upon you?  
12 Your maxims are proverbs of ashes,  
your defences are defences of clay.

### Job 12:1-12

Look, my eye has seen all this, what you know, I also know. Job here complained against the claim of superior knowledge on the part of his friends. To them - especially perhaps to Zophar - the situation seemed so simple; therefore Job must be somewhat ignorant to see what they believed was so easy to see.

But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God. However, before he turns to God in lament, Job argues that his friends have both misdiagnosed him by calling his friends worthless physicians and that they have also misrepresented God.

Job here developed a theme that would end with a virtual demand that God make sense of his suffering. God's response to Job's demand and Job's response to God's response makes up the last few chapters of the book. The reader senses the deep frustration in Job that prompted this plea: <<*I desire to argue my case with God*>>. It was bad enough when he could make no sense of his situation; but it was worse when his friends persistently insisted on their

own wrong answer to Job's crisis. As much as anything, it was their insistence that prompted Job to demand an answer and vindication with it from God.

As for you, you whitewash with lies; all of you are worthless physicians. The image of applying whitewash is not itself negative, but refers to the process of repairing something that is cracked or broken, e.g. a pot, by smearing it with a material that would both bond the pieces and seal the cracks. Job's contention with his friends is that they have sought to whitewash the situation with what they ought to know is not true about either Job or God.

The same devastating frustration that led Job to wish he were dead now leads him in bitter response to his friends' accusations. The reader can sympathise with Job's situation and turmoil, all the while recognising that Christians especially are called to a better standard than Job: <<*Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all*>> (Romans 12:17), and: <<*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly*>> (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Hear now my reasoning, and listen to the pleadings of my lips. Job uses law and present court language to make his case – he is stating his arguments. The friends are denigrating Job in their arguments and showing favouritism to his divine opponent in making their case for him (v.8). In the end God does rebuke the friends, exactly as Job had warned: <<*After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done'*>> (Job 42:7-8).

Will you speak falsely for God, will you plead the case for God? Job's friends were very confident in their ability to speak for God; but since what they said was not true, they actually misrepresented them. They acted like lawyers on God's behalf; but since they did not truly represent him, Job could rightly ask: "Will it be well with you when he searches you out?"

He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality. The partiality Job's friends showed was toward themselves. Job knew they would never want to be treated the way that they were treating Job.

Will not his majesty terrify you? Job questions whether his friends have taken seriously the glory and power of God in how easily and lightly they have spoken on his behalf. In a later response, Job speaks of his own fear at the thought of facing the majesty of God: <<*For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty*>> (Job 31:23).

Your maxims are proverbs of ashes. The friends of Job claimed to know wisdom and speak wisely; Job dismissed their supposed guidance as mere platitudes. Their wisdom had no substance, no use, and left Job feeling burned-over - truly, proverbs of ashes.

- 13 'Let me have silence, and I will speak,  
and let come on me what may.
- 14 I will take my flesh in my teeth,  
and put my life in my hand.
- 15 See, he will kill me; I have no hope;  
but I will defend my ways to his face.
- 16 This will be my salvation,  
that the godless shall not come before him.
- 17 Listen carefully to my words,  
and let my declaration be in your ears.
- 18 I have indeed prepared my case;  
I know that I shall be vindicated.
- 19 Who is there that will contend with me?  
For then I would be silent and die.

### Job 12:13-19

Let me have silence, and I will speak. Perhaps at this point Job's friends tried to interrupt him or said their own words of protest. Job demanded the right to finish his statement.

See, he will kill me. Job is aware of the force of his own argument in Job 12:17-25, yet cannot avoid taking the risk that God will slay him.

I have no hope. Hope is to wait for something; waiting may or may not be patient, and it may or may not be with a positive expectation. Job is impatient and expects his life will end shortly. Job will not wait; he is willing to risk his life to make his

case against God, but: <<*the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so you destroy the hope of mortals*>> (Job 14:19).

Writing fictionally in the voice of a senior demon instructing a junior demon in his popular book *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis stated - from a demon's perspective - this dynamic of trial in the life of the believer: "He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles. Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys."

Charles Spurgeon comments, "It is well worthy of observation that in these words Job answered both the accusations of Satan and the charges of his friends. Though I do not know that Job was aware that the devil had said, 'Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not set a hedge about him and all that he hath?' Yet he answered that base suggestion in the ablest possible manner, for he did in effect say, 'Though God should pull down my hedge, and lay me bare as the wilderness itself, yet will I cling to him in firmest faith.'" And again, "There are three things in the text: a terrible supposition - "though he slay me"; a noble resolution, "yet will I trust in him"; and, thirdly, a secret appropriateness. This last will require a little looking into, but I hope to make it clear that there is a great appropriateness in our trusting while God is slaying us - the two things go well together, though it may not so appear."

But I will defend my ways to his face, I know that I shall be vindicated. Before his crisis, Job believed himself to be a blameless and upright man, as indeed he was as stated in both Job 1:1 and Job 1:8. He steadfastly clung to this belief throughout all his experience of calamity and through all the protests and arguments of his friends. Even before God he would defend his own ways - not in arrogance but in determined connection with reality. In this, Job is a remarkable example of a man who will not forfeit what he knows to be true in the midst of the storm. This is actually an area of great difficulty; because such storms are undeniably helpful in shaking people from their wrong beliefs - their guiding fictions. Some who have felt they had Job's determination to hold on to the truth actually merely were sinfully stubborn. Yet Job did not question the concept of truth or his ability to know it; he knew that God himself would agree that Job's disaster did not come upon him because of special or severe sin; he knew God himself would agree that Job was a blameless and upright man.

Jesus demonstrated something similar in an answer to his disciples' question about whose sin caused a man to be born blind: <<*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor*

*his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him'>> (John 9:1-3). Job's current situation would demonstrate the grace, mercy and glory of God in its resolution.*

The godless shall not come before him. The salvation Job hopes for is that he will yet be able to make the case for his innocence before God. He anticipates that God will yet be his redeemer: <<*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth*>> (Job 19:25).

David too knew that God was his living redeemer: <<*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer*>> (Psalm 19:14), as did the prophets: <<*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god*>> (Isaiah 44:6), and: <<*Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name. He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon*>> (Jeremiah 50:34). The apostle Paul shows that redemption now comes through Christ: <<*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'*>> (Galatians 3:13), and: <<*He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds*>> (Titus 2:14).

For then I would be silent and die. In one sense, it seems that Job felt that this determined connection to truth and reality was all he had. He had lost everything, including his sense of spiritual well-being. All he had was the truth, and he felt that if he let go of that to simply stop the argument or to please his friends, he would perish.

#### II.b.i.6.B Job 13:20-14:22 - Job's Despondent Prayer

In this passage of lament before God, Job moves from referring primarily to his own situation (vv.20-27) to focus on the nature of life for any mortal.

20 Only grant two things to me,  
then I will not hide myself from your face:  
21 withdraw your hand far from me,  
and do not let dread of you terrify me.  
22 Then call, and I will answer;  
or let me speak, and you reply to me.  
23 How many are my iniquities and my sins?  
Make me know my transgression and my sin.

- 24 Why do you hide your face,  
and count me as your enemy?
- 25 Will you frighten a windblown leaf  
and pursue dry chaff?
- 26 For you write bitter things against me,  
and make me reap the iniquities of my youth.
- 27 You put my feet in the stocks,  
and watch all my paths;  
you set a bound to the soles of my feet.

### Job 12:20-27

Only grant two things to me. Job abruptly shifts from warning his friends to pleading his case with God.

Do not withdraw your hand far from me. Earlier, Job had told God that he just wanted to be left alone; refer to Job 7:16. Now he shows that this previous feeling was just a feeling and that really he did not want God to withdraw his hand far from him. This shows that at least in some sense, Job understood that God's hand was sustaining him in the midst of this great trial. His feeling of abandonment can be readily understood; yet Job can grudgingly admit that God's hand has been with him in the fire of affliction.

Do not let dread of you terrify me. Here the value that Job placed upon his personal connection with God can be sensed and he worried that this present season would destroy it. Job wanted restored communication with God (then call, and I will answer). The fear Job was concerned about was not the good and proper fear of God; instead, this was prompted by dread. The wrong kind of fear of God is being afraid that God intends harm on one that he clearly loves; the right kind is fear that one's actions will hurt God.

Make me know my transgression and my sin. Job has steadfastly held to his own innocence, in the sense that there was no special or severe sin that prompted his recent cataclysm of suffering, and despite the eloquent pleas of his friends. At the same time, he will allow for the possibility that he is wrong. Therefore, he prayed this wonderful prayer, asking God to show him his iniquities and sins. Job's words here catch the attitude of the later psalmist, King David: <<**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**>> (Psalm 139:23-24).

Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy? Again, Job's agony is sensed. He longed for restored communication and communion with God but felt as though God was hiding from him and regarded him as an enemy. Job would later again refer to his concern at seeking God and not finding him: <<*If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him*>> (Job 23:8-9).

Will you frighten a windblown leaf and pursue dry chaff? Spurgeon writes, "It is a common figure he uses, that of a leaf driven to and fro. Strong gusts of wind, it may be in the autumn when the leaves hang but lightly upon the trees, send them falling in showers around us; quite helpless to stay their own course, fluttering in the air to and fro, like winged birds that cannot steer themselves, but are guided by every fitful blast that blows upon them, at last they sink into the mire, to be trodden down and forgotten. To them Job likens himself—a helpless, hopeless, worthless, weak, despised, perishing thing."

For you write bitter things against me. Job is referring to God's accusations against him, not to an indictment to punish him with suffering. This is another example of the truth that Job did not believe himself to be without sin. Instead, he recognised the iniquities of my youth and feared that God was now charging these sins against him.

Make me reap the iniquities of my youth. The suggestion has been made that God is a doctor, writing a prescription for bitter medicine; or a judge, prescribing bitter punishment; or recording Job's bitter crimes. The writing is the decree allocating bitter things to Job. David would later voice his knowledge that God actually brought blessings not curses upon his people, those who acknowledge that he is Lord: <<*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit*>> (Psalm 32:1-2 NIV).

You put my feet in the stocks. Because he felt that God was against him, Job felt completely hindered and fenced-in by God. He felt as if his feet were limited and his paths were closely watched.

You set a bound to the soles of my feet. This is literally, 'You inscribe a print on my feet.' The metaphor refers either to confinement, i.e. set a boundary or limit for, or to the tracing of movement. Both concepts are present: Job's feet are in the stocks and God watches everywhere he goes. Both cannot be true at the same time but both express God's vigilant pursuit of Job.

<sup>28</sup> One wastes away like a rotten thing,  
like a garment that is moth-eaten.

## Job 12:28

One wastes away. The speech takes another abrupt turn. Job's thoughts on mortality are introduced with a proverb, which uses a pronoun as a generic reference to the human race. Job's eloquent meditation on the greatness of God (especially in Job 12:1-25, earlier in this same speech) certainly elevated God. However, it also made man, by comparison, seem like a rotten thing. Job essentially agreed with Zophar's understanding of the depravity of man in Job 11:5-6; his disagreement was with Zophar's application of that doctrine to Job's current circumstance.

Like a garment that is moth-eaten. Job's statement was more than a poetic description of the depravity of man in general; it was a discouraged sigh over his own condition. Job was the one decaying like a rotten thing; Job was like a garment that is moth-eaten. Zophar could talk about it; Job was living it.