



## Job - Chapter Fourteen

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### Summary of Chapter Fourteen

As part of an ongoing general response to Zophar's claims against him, Job reflects on the shortness, misery, and sinfulness of man's life (vv.1-4); the unavoidable necessity of death and the hope of a general resurrection (vv.5-15); then Job deplores his own state and the general wretchedness of man (vv.16-22).

- <sup>1</sup> 'A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble,
- <sup>2</sup> comes up like a flower and withers,  
flees like a shadow and does not last.

### Job 14:1-2

A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble. Having mentioned the idea of the frailty of mankind in general and his own frailty in particular, Job here expands on the idea. He considers that the days of man on this earth are short and often full of trials and tribulation.

This description of human life can be traced back to being the result of original sin: <<*And to the man he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not*

*eat of it”, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life>> (Genesis 3:17).*

Comes up like a flower and withers. This reference to the fragility of nature in general is a good analogy for human life and is used elsewhere in Scripture: <<*As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more>> (Psalm 103:15-16), <<A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever>> (Isaiah 40:6-8), and: <<Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field>> (James 1:9-10).*

A mortal flees like a shadow and does not last. Considering the life of man - fleeting and frail - Job also speculated on what happened to man after this fading, shadow-like life; considering that perhaps it does not continue. Job was not giving a general polemic against resurrection. On the contrary, he was saying that if God wanted to, he could hide Job in Sheol until his anger passed and then raise him (v.13)

- <sup>3</sup> Do you fix your eyes on such a one?  
Do you bring me into judgement with you?
- <sup>4</sup> Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?  
No one can.
- <sup>5</sup> Since their days are determined,  
and the number of their months is known to you,  
and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass,
- <sup>6</sup> look away from them, and desist,  
that they may enjoy, like labourers, their days.

#### Job 14:3-6

Do you fix your eyes on such a one? Job here applied his previous thoughts on the fleeting and frail nature of humanity to prayer over his own situation. “God, you see that I am the rotting one; the moth-eaten garment; the fading flower and the fleeing shadow. Look upon me in mercy!”

Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Job describes human life as hard and short, a theme already declared to the friends in Job 7:1-10, and uses this

question and answer to point out that no mortal is able to work outside of the limits that God has set. Job despairs that perhaps God demands something of him that he is unable to be or do. If God demands perfect cleanness before he will relieve Job's affliction, then Job knew he could never meet that standard.

**The apostle Paul provides the answer to Job's question:** <<*You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus*>> (Ephesians 2:1-7).

Since their days are determined, and the number of their months is known to you. It seems that it was Job's understanding that all human life was mapped out and its length predetermined by God irrespective of the choices that individuals may make during their life. Paul said something similar in Athens: <<*From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us*>> (Acts 17:26-27).

You have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass, look away from them, and desist, that they may enjoy, like labourers, their days. Job continued to paint the picture of God fencing people in, restricting their movements. Under such an idea, it would be better if God would just look away so the afflicted one could rest.

- 7 'For there is hope for a tree,  
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,  
and that its shoots will not cease.
- 8 Though its root grows old in the earth,  
and its stump dies in the ground,
- 9 yet at the scent of water it will bud  
and put forth branches like a young plant.
- 10 But mortals die, and are laid low;

humans expire, and where are they?

- 11 As waters fail from a lake,  
and a river wastes away and dries up,  
12 so mortals lie down and do not rise again;  
until the heavens are no more, they will not awake  
or be roused out of their sleep.

### Job 14:7-12

Job laments the limits of mortality by contrasting the consequences of **cutting down a tree** (vv.7-9) and the death of **humans** (vv.10-14). **There is hope for a tree** that even if its **root** and **stump** decay, it may still grow again. However, when a man dies, his life on earth is finished. Thus Job says that, although a tree may sprout again, he must look for renewal within the days of his life on earth. The Hebrew words translated as **sprout again** and **release** (v.14) are related.

**And that its shoots will not cease.** Although Job had no thoughts or knowledge of a Messiah yet to come and clearly did not intend this as a prophetic statement, yet it links to other passages that are: *<<A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots>>* (Isaiah 11:1), and: *<<For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him>>* (Isaiah 53:2).

**Where are they?** Since the focus of this section is mortal life, Job's question does not specifically pertain to his thoughts on life after death, which he possibly alludes to in v.12, but to the fact that there is no chance for vindication through restored life on earth after suffering and death.

**So mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep.** The reader comes to another place in the Book of Job reflecting the shadowy and uncertain understanding of the afterlife. The reader may simply think that Job was wrong in his understanding of the afterlife. Job's lack of knowledge of the afterlife can be explained by understanding the principle of 2 Timothy 2:10 - that Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. The understanding of immortality was at best cloudy in the OT, but is much clearer in the NT. For example, it can be said that Jesus knew fully what he was talking about when he described hell and judgement, such as in Matthew 25:41-46. Christians therefore rely on the NT for their understanding of the afterlife, much more than the OT. The reader also understands that this does not in any way take away from the truth of the Bible and the Book of Job. What is true is that Job actually said this and actually believed it (or that it was the concept of the time it was written if Job is an

allegory); the truth of the statement itself must be evaluated according to the rest of the Bible. Later, God challenged and corrected Job's presumptuous assertions regarding the afterlife, reminding Job that he did not in fact know that life after death was like: <<*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*>> (Job 38:2), and: <<*Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?*>> (Job 38:17).

### Introduction to vv.13-22

Although Job longs for renewal in which God would secure his path and forgive his sin (vv.15-17), he concludes that just as the elements wash away rock and soil, so God will wear down a man over the course of his life (vv.18-22).

- 13 O that you would hide me in Sheol,  
that you would conceal me until your wrath is past,  
that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me!
- 14 If mortals die, will they live again?  
All the days of my service I would wait  
until my release should come.
- 15 You would call, and I would answer you;  
you would long for the work of your hands.
- 16 For then you would not number my steps,  
you would not keep watch over my sin;
- 17 my transgression would be sealed up in a bag,  
and you would cover over my iniquity.

### Job 14:13-17

O that you would hide me in Sheol. Job did not know much about the condition of man after death, but he supposed - perhaps hoped - that it was better than his current misery. Yet Job's general uncertainty is reflected in his question, "If mortals die, will they live again?"

All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come. Job looked for the release he hoped death to bring, that at least it would relieve him from his present agony.

Job here hoped for a restoration of relationship with God after death since he no longer really hoped for a restoration during this life. The tension or perhaps confusion is seen in Job regarding the afterlife. To say, "You would call, and I

would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands” is much more hopeful and positive than previous statements.

For then you would not number my steps, you would not keep watch over my sin; my transgression would be sealed up in a bag, and you would cover over my iniquity. Job prayed these words not only because he desperately wanted God to not judge him according to the full measure of his sins, but also because he wanted Zophar and the others to hear that Job did in fact know that he was a sinner and not perfect as Zophar had accused Job of being: <<*For you say, “My conduct is pure, and I am clean in God’s sight”*>> (Job 11:4).

Job clearly has the understanding that God is watching his every move, a theme that appears elsewhere in Scripture: <<*O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways*>> (Psalm 139:1-3), <<*For human ways are under the eyes of the Lord, and he examines all their paths*>> (Proverbs 5:21), and: <<*For my eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from my presence, nor is their iniquity concealed from my sight*>> (Jeremiah 16:17).

- 18 ‘But the mountain falls and crumbles away,  
and the rock is removed from its place;  
19 the waters wear away the stones;  
the torrents wash away the soil of the earth;  
so you destroy the hope of mortals.  
20 You prevail for ever against them, and they pass away;  
you change their countenance, and send them away.  
21 Their children come to honour, and they do not know it;  
they are brought low, and it goes unnoticed.  
22 They feel only the pain of their own bodies,  
and mourn only for themselves.’

#### Job 14:18-22

But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place. Job pictured a great mountain crumbling away, or a flood sweeping away great tracts of earth; he considered that this illustrated the way that God sweeps away the hope of mortals. The idea is that when God sets himself against a person, there is nothing that the person can do about it; God will prevail for ever against them, and they pass away.

Here Job evokes the language of his earlier description: although a tree may have hope of renewal (v.7), God can remove the hope of mortals through the persistent eroding effect of suffering and difficulty. In Job's poetic outpouring in Chapter 14, in the middle of the poem he gives his glorious confidence in the resurrection; yet the poem ends back in despair - so you destroy the hope of mortals. Yet it would be wrong to think that it means that Job's hope of resurrection was only temporary or fleeting.

Their children come to honour, and they do not know it. The man swept away by God does not know the good or bad things that happen to his family after he passes from this life. Job considered how fundamentally unfair all of this seemed; that somehow, even this swept away one's hope by the not knowing as much as anything else, i.e. they feel only the pain of their own bodies. This concept is further illustrated in: <<*For what do they care for their household after them, when the number of their months is cut off?*>> (Job 21:21), and: <<*The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost*>> (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

And mourn only for themselves. These words fittingly conclude this section recording Job's speech to his friends and his prayers to God. His soul is genuinely in mourning, and much of what is read is the agonised outpouring of his feelings.

It is easy to read these emotional outbursts and the lack of theological detachment in this blameless and upright man and think that Job was less spiritual than he should be. Yet it must be remembered that the Book of Job records many of Job's opinions that are borne out of great pain and frustration, opinions that are later corrected and reproved in Job 38:2 and Job 38:17.

The Christian reader may be somewhat reminded of Jesus' words: <<*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*>> (Mark 15:34b). On the one hand, those words were a true and accurate description of how Jesus felt; he rightly felt forsaken by God the Father at that moment. He felt it because Jesus not only endured the withdrawal of the Father's fellowship, but also the actual outpouring of the Father's wrath upon him as a substitute for sinful humanity. At the same time, it cannot be said that the separation between the Father and the Son at the Cross was complete, because as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:19 God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself at the Cross.

**For a fuller view on the purposes of Jesus' cry on the Cross taken from Psalm 22:1 refer to the comments made on Mark 15:34.**

According to the same example, it can be said of Job's suffering that his feelings were real and understandable; yet there was a truth that went beyond his feelings that made sense of his suffering, although that truth was completely veiled to Job.