



Job - Chapter Thirty One

- II [Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God \(continues\)](#)
- II.c [Job 26:1-31:40 - Job: the Power of God, Place of Wisdom, and Path of Integrity \(continues/concludes\)](#)
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Summary of Chapter Thirty One

After contrasting the honour of his past (Chapter 29) with the disdain he receives because of his circumstances in the present (Chapter 30), Job confesses one last time that he has lived his life in the pursuit of righteousness because he believes that is how it should be lived before God, that turning from God's way is without benefit, and that further curses should come on him if these things are not true.

Job begins by affirming his commitment to fidelity and questions how he could break it (vv.1-4). Sections that follow each open with a conditional statement implying that his life has not been patterned by what is described: stealing or coveting (vv.5-8 and vv.9-12), neglecting the needs of those both within his household and without (vv.13-15, vv.16-18, vv.19-23 and vv.31-32), trust in or worship of anything other than God (vv.24-28), concealing hatred or sin (vv.29-30 and vv.33-34), or improper oversight of his land (vv.38-40). Embedded in the end of this section is a final wish that the charges would be presented to him so that he could give an account (vv.35-37).

- 1 'I have made a covenant with my eyes;
how then could I look upon a virgin?
- 2 What would be my portion from God above,

and my heritage from the Almighty on high?

³ Does not calamity befall the unrighteous,
and disaster the workers of iniquity?

⁴ Does he not see my ways,
and number all my steps?

Job 31:1-4

In affirming his moral purity, Job recalls a personal commitment he had made regarding what he would and would not gaze at, what he calls a covenant with my eyes. In particular, he professes purity in avoiding sexual lust: how then could I look upon a virgin? The faithful reader would recognise the soundness of such a commitment, and Jesus teaches about such purity of desires: <<*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart*>> (Matthew 5:28), and the apostle stated: <<*They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!*>> (2 Peter 2:14). Job's ability to control himself was connected with a covenant he had made with God. He made a vow, a promise, a commitment with his own eyes that he would not look upon a young woman in a sinful way. Job insisted that he would not look upon a young woman - a maiden in this way. This was especially meaningful, because in that culture it would be somewhat accepted for a rich and powerful man like Job to seduce or ravish any unmarried woman he desired and then add her as either a wife or a concubine. Job restrained himself from women that others in his same circumstances would not restrain themselves from.

In this section, Job protested that he was a godly and blameless man, at least on a human scale. His larger context was to explain the sense of injustice he felt at his suffering and humiliation, and to make a final defence before his friends who accused him of special sin deserving of special judgement.

In defending his righteous life, Job began by explaining that he was a morally pure man who did not look upon a young woman in impure and inappropriate ways. It is significant that in this long section where Job explained his righteous life, he began with noting that he guarded his eyes from lustful looks upon a young woman. This rightly suggests that a man's ability to not look upon lustful images is an important indicator of his general righteousness and blamelessness. This also suggests that the eyes are a gateway for lust, especially for men. This is demonstrated over and over again by both personal experience and empirical study. When a man places enticing, sensual, lust-inducing images before his eyes, it is a form of foreplay, especially considering that it often or frequently causes some level of sexual arousal in the man.

What would be my portion from God above, and my heritage from the Almighty on high? In the context of Job's self-control when it came to lust, he considered what the allotment of God from above was. He understood that the young woman he would be enticed to look upon was not the allotment of God for him; she and her nakedness did not belong to Job in any sense.

Leviticus 18:1-18 reinforces this Biblical principle. It relates how the nakedness of an individual 'belongs' to that individual and to their spouse, and it does not 'belong' to anyone else. Therefore, when a man looks upon the nakedness of a woman who is not his wife, he takes something that does not belong to him. There certainly existed some type of pornography in Job's day; some of the earliest artistic images are of women and men in highly sexualised motifs. Nevertheless, Job certainly did not have to contend with the sophisticated, gigantic, and far-reaching modern pornography industry. The availability of modern pornography has made it a significantly greater challenge for men to confine their visual arousal to the allotment of God from above for them. In this context, it is helpful for a man to ask himself: "Whose nakedness belongs to me, and whose does not?" Only a proud and depraved man would think that every woman's nakedness belongs to him. A moment of thought reinforces the clear principle: only the nakedness of his own wife is the allotment of God from above for a man; only his own wife is the inheritance of the Almighty from on high for his visual arousal.

Does not calamity befall the unrighteous, and disaster the workers of iniquity?

In the context of Job's self-control when it came to lust, he also considered the destructive nature of allowing one's self to be aroused by alluring images. He perhaps considered the lives of others that had been destroyed by lust and sexual sin that began with visual arousal.

Job believes that his life is lived before and governed by the Almighty, who does number all my steps. His confidence in this fact is the grounds upon which he uses the same vocabulary to make his final wish that the Almighty might answer him (v.35) and that he could <<*give him 'an account of all my steps'*>> (v.37).

In the context of Job's self-control when it came to lust, it was helpful for him to consider that God's eye was upon him all the time. Most men indulge in ungodly visual arousal with the at least temporary delusion that their conduct is unseen by God. It helped Job to know that God did see all his ways.

- ⁵ 'If I have walked with falsehood,
and my foot has hurried to deceit —
- ⁶ let me be weighed in a just balance,
and let God know my integrity! —

7 if my step has turned aside from the way,
and my heart has followed my eyes,
and if any spot has clung to my hands;
8 then let me sow, and another eat;
and let what grows for me be rooted out.

Job 31:5-8

Job's references to the way he has walked to where his heart has led him, and to whether he has turned aside from the way describe his life in images that evoke the profile of wisdom, as seen, for example, in Proverbs 4:10-19 and 4:23-27. Job also proclaimed his blameless life because he lived an essentially truthful life. He was not afraid to be weighed in a just balance and have his life examined in an honest way, either by man or by God: <<***Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts***>> (Psalm 139:23).

If my step has turned aside from the way, then let me sow, and another eat.

Job was not afraid to call a curse upon himself if he indeed was not an honest man. He was willing to be deprived of the fruit of his own labour if it was true that he was found lacking on the honest scales of God's judgement. The confidence Job had in calling curses upon himself if he were not truthful is impressive. It is as if he said to his friends, "Do you think that I am trying to make out before God that I am what I have not been? Would I talk to God with what would be blatant insolence if I had not the facts to back me up?"

9 'If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
and I have lain in wait at my neighbour's door;
10 then let my wife grind for another,
and let other men kneel over her.
11 For that would be a heinous crime;
that would be a criminal offence;
12 for that would be a fire consuming down to Abaddon,
and it would burn to the root all my harvest.

Job 31:9-12

If my heart has been enticed by a woman. The next area of integrity Job proclaimed had to do with faithfulness to his wife within the marriage. He understood that this had more than a sexual aspect (perhaps first mentioned in

vv.1-4), but also included the heart being enticed. Job touched upon a significant truth; that it is entirely possible to allow one's heart to be enticed by another. These things happen because of choices one makes, not merely because one has been acted upon by the mystical or magical power of romantic love. Instead, Job insisted that for him to have his heart enticed by another would be wickedness, and indeed it would be iniquity deserving of judgement. He understood that he had control over whom he would allow his heart to be enticed by: <<*Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshipping them*>> (Deuteronomy 11:16), <<*The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, "No eye will see me"; and he disguises his face*>> (Job 24:15), and: <<*No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it*>> (James 1:13-14).

Job grounds his own caution against adultery (v.9) in the warnings of its consequences, both in being punished by the judges for a criminal offence (refer also to v.28) and in its having ruinous and far-reaching effects like fire: <<*Can fire be carried in the bosom without burning one's clothes? Or can one walk on hot coals without scorching the feet? So is he who sleeps with his neighbour's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished*>> (Proverbs 6:27-29).

Then let my wife grind for another. Job insisted that if he had been unfaithful in heart or in action towards his wife then he would deserve to have his wife taken from him and given to another.

For that would be a fire consuming down to Abaddon. Job also understood that allowing his heart to be enticed by a woman other than his wife would bring a destructive, burnt-out result. The reference to Abaddon signifies Job's presumption that the way he has walked has consequences beyond the mere extent of all his earthly increase; refer to Proverbs 7:21-27.

- 13 'If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves,
when they brought a complaint against me;
- 14 what then shall I do when God rises up?
When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?
- 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them?
And did not one fashion us in the womb?

Job 31:13-15

If I have rejected the cause of my male or female slaves. Job continued the presentation of his own righteousness by noting the good and compassionate treatment of his servants. The goodness of a man or a woman is often best

indicated by how they treat those thought to be inferior to themselves, not how they treat their peers or those thought to be superior to themselves. Job did not reject the needs of his servants lest they should have a complaint against him for which he would have no answer before God. Job will use this vocabulary again in his final plea that he would receive an answer from his ‘adversary’ (v.35).

What then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? One reason Job treated his servants well was because he understood that he would have to answer to God for his actions towards others, including his servants. He understood that God cared about his servants and would avenge ill-treatment of them. Job again had much the same heart as later clearly explained in the NT. Paul had the same intent when he told masters to treat their servants well: *<<And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality>>* (Ephesians 6:9).

Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Another reason Job treated his servants well was because he recognised their essential humanity. This was both remarkable and admirable in a time when it was almost universally understood that servants and slaves were subhuman when compared with those whom they served.

And did not one fashion us in the womb? David, like Job, wrote of the concept of God creating the foetus: *<<For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb>>* (Psalm 139:13).

16 ‘If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
17 or have eaten my morsel alone,
and the orphan has not eaten from it —
18 for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father,
and from my mother’s womb I guided the widow —
19 if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
or a poor person without covering,
20 whose loins have not blessed me,
and who was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;
21 if I have raised my hand against the orphan,
because I saw I had supporters at the gate;

22 then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,
and let my arm be broken from its socket.

23 For I was in terror of calamity from God,
and I could not have faced his majesty.

Job 31:16-23

Care for the poor, widow (v.16), fatherless (v.17), needy (v.19), and stranger or traveller (vv.31-32) is prescribed in the Pentateuch; refer to Exodus 22:21-27, Leviticus 19:33 and Deuteronomy 24:17-18. Such action shows that someone understands that he or she lives with others before God and is called to fear him alone. Job lived this way because he believed God weighed his actions, and he understood that calamity was the consequence for the unrighteous (vv.2-4).

If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder. In the same manner as before, Job called for a curse upon himself if it was true that he had not cared for the poor and helpless as he claimed he had. He knew that if he had been cruel and oppressive to the poor and needy, he knew that he would indeed deserve punishment, and this was part of his motivation to care the way that he did, i.e. I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty.

24 'If I have made gold my trust,
or called fine gold my confidence;
25 if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great,
or because my hand had acquired much;
26 if I have looked at the sun when it shone,
or the moon moving in splendour,
27 and my heart has been secretly enticed,
and my mouth has kissed my hand;
28 this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges,
for I should have been false to God above.

Job 31:24-28

If I have made gold my trust. Job knew that wealthy men often found it easy to trust in riches: <<*No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth*>> (Matthew 6:24), <<*And he said to them, 'Take*

care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions'>> (Luke 12:15). Therefore he again insisted that he had not made riches his hope or his confidence and also had not rejoiced because his wealth was great. Job has guarded against both the idolatry of trusting the wealth that God has provided rather than trusting God (vv.24-25), and the idolatry of worshipping what God has created (vv.26-27). Job's faithfulness in this matter is grounded in the fact that idolatry is to be punished by the judges as an action that is false to God above, as is adultery. This is the emphasis of Job's final appeal: he has consciously lived his life as if it were open before and in service to the God of heaven and earth.

It is probable (although not certain) that the Book of Job was written before any of the other received books of Scripture were given. Therefore, he knew that idolatry was wrong by both natural revelation and by conscience. He knew that since there was a true, living God enthroned in the heavens, it was an iniquity deserving of judgement to deny the God who is above and to worship any other.

²⁹ 'If I have rejoiced at the ruin of those who hated me,
or exulted when evil overtook them —
³⁰ I have not let my mouth sin
by asking for their lives with a curse —
³¹ if those of my tent ever said,
“O that we might be sated with his flesh!” —
³² the stranger has not lodged in the street;
I have opened my doors to the traveller —
³³ if I have concealed my transgressions as others do,
by hiding my iniquity in my bosom,
³⁴ because I stood in great fear of the multitude,
and the contempt of families terrified me,
so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors —

Job 31:29-34

If I have rejoiced at the ruin of those who hated me. As further testimony to his personal righteousness, Job claimed that he had not been happy when his enemies had suffered and been destroyed. This is certainly one mark of a man after God's heart, who also takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, as seen in:

<<Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?>> (Ezekiel 33:11)

By asking for their lives with a curse. Job did not even curse his enemies. He kept himself from this most natural reaction.

O that we might be sated with his flesh! The statement obviously calls for a negative response; those of Job's household were always well fed. Offering food and lodging was of critical importance to secure strangers from the dangers of the streets at night. Job was also a diligent man when it came to hospitality. He would not allow a visitor to sleep on the street and instead he opened his doors to the traveller. This scenario of taking in strangers is seen elsewhere in Scripture: *<<The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said, 'Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.' They said, 'No; we will spend the night in the square.' But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate>> (Genesis 19:1-3), and: <<Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) When the old man looked up and saw the wayfarer in the open square of the city, he said, 'Where are you going and where do you come from?' He answered him, 'We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; and I am going to my home. Nobody has offered to take me in. We your servants have straw and fodder for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and the woman and the young man along with us. We need nothing more.' The old man said, 'Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the square.' So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank>> (Judges 19:16-21).*

If I have concealed my transgressions as others do. The basic and consistent argument of Job's friends against him was that although he appeared to be righteous, he really must be covering some serious sin that made sense of the calamity that came against him. Therefore, Job insisted that he was not covering his sins as Adam, who had blamed Eve and even God, vainly trying to cover his sin: *<<The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate'>> (Genesis 3:12).*

I stood in great fear of the multitude. Here Job answered the accusation that he was motivated to hide his sin because of the fear of how it would appear before

the public. Job's friends had probably known many seemingly righteous people who had hidden their sins and were destroyed when they were eventually exposed, and they assumed Job was like them. Job here rightly protested that he was not like such men who hide their sin out of fear of public humiliation and contempt.

- 35 O that I had one to hear me!
(Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!)
O that I had the indictment written by my adversary!
- 36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder;
I would bind it on me like a crown;
- 37 I would give him an account of all my steps;
like a prince I would approach him.

Job 31:35-37

O that I had one to hear me! It seems that Job interrupted his defence of the morality and righteousness of his life. He probably had much more he could say to defend himself but broke off that line of reasoning and made a final, dramatic appeal to be heard before the throne of God.

Let the Almighty answer me! Job was absolutely convinced that what he needed was vindication or at least an answer from God. His friends thoroughly analysed his situation and came to completely wrong conclusions. Job could not make sense of it himself. Here he called God out to answer for what he had done. This is the demand that Job would later repent of: *<<I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes>>* (Job 42:5-6). Job would come to find that he had no right to demand an answer from God, and indeed had to be content when God seemed to refuse an answer.

O that I had the indictment written by my adversary! This shows the profound yet understandable spiritual confusion of Job. He felt that God was his accuser (my adversary), when really it was Satan. The reader can readily sympathise with Job, knowing that he could not see behind that mysterious curtain that separated earth from heaven; yet there is a lesson to be learnt from what Job should have known.

Surely I would carry it on my shoulder. Here Job, stepping over a boundary he would later repent of, longed to have the accusation of God against him written out so he could refute it as he had so effectively refuted his friends. He was so confident in what he knew of himself that he said he would approach God like a prince. Job was indeed confident in what he did know; that he was a blameless and upright man who did not bring the catastrophe upon himself by his own special

sin. What he was much too confident about were the things he could not see; the things that happened in the spiritual realm, known to the readers of Job Chapters 1-2 but unknown to Job in the story. Somewhat like his friends, Job thought he had it all figured out, but he did not.

Job wishes once again for an answer regarding his offenses, so that he might give an account of all my steps to the one who numbers them (v.4); the Hebrew for 'numbers' and 'account' are related).

38 'If my land has cried out against me,
and its furrows have wept together;
39 if I have eaten its yield without payment,
and caused the death of its owners;
40 let thorns grow instead of wheat,
and foul weeds instead of barley.'

The words of Job are ended.

Job 31:38-40

If my land has cried out against me. In this chapter Job testified to his own integrity in the most solemn of terms, calling repeated curses upon himself if his friends could indeed demonstrate that he was a conspicuous sinner worthy of conspicuous judgement or discipline from God. Now he called one more witness on his behalf: his own land and property. God told Cain that the ground in which he had buried Abel called out against him: <<*And the Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!'*>> (Genesis 4:10).

The words of Job are ended. It is not that there are no more words from Job in this book; he will speak again briefly in later chapters. Yet Job has definitely finished arguing his case. He is finished; one more man will try in vain to fix the problem; and then God will appear. It might rightly be said that God - silent to this point - could not or would not appear and speak until all the arguments of man were exhausted.

There are two similar phrases in Scripture that do not mark the final words of the person who is referenced: <<*The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended*>> (Psalm 72:20), and: <<*The words of Jeremiah end here*>> (Jeremiah 51:64b NIV).