

Job Chapter 13

In our last class, we reviewed chapter 12 in which Job begins his response to Zophar's accusations. In his response, Job tries to demonstrate that he understands where his friends are coming from. He can see himself through their eyes. By this, Job hopes to convince them that he is further along in his thinking than they are. This is evidenced when Job recounts their essential arguments back to them in verses 13-25, and then follows in chapter 13:1-2 with: "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." In this tactic, Job is also patterning behavior he would like for them to follow – to see the matter from his perspective. Job expresses frustration over his wisdom and discernment being despised on account of his misfortune.

In Job chapter 13, Job continues his reply to Zophar and his defense in general. I think it would be helpful to first give the chapter a cursory reading before proceeding with the analysis below, if you have not yet already.

We've covered verses 1 and 2 already, so let's jump into what follows.

Verses 3-4 set up an interesting contrast that Job perceives between himself and his friends. Job wants to discuss what is going on with God, but he doesn't see that same desire on the part of his friends. Instead, he perceives only their confidence in what they claim is true. In Job's view as we see in verse 4, they are content to gloss over, ignore, and/or dismiss the depth of Job's reasonings because in their eyes, he must be guilty of some sin. The idea of "whitewash" in verse 4 means to "patch up" or "stick together," and there is some humor to when Job refers to them as worthless physicians. Basically, they are trying to "patch him up" with lies and false accusations, perhaps like a worthless physician would try to treat a serious injury by just covering it up with a bandage. They don't understand that what they are saying is not helping, but they are convinced they know what is best.

In verse 5, my summary of what Job is saying is "just stop talking, please. I've demonstrated that I understand your arguments, so what further need is there of you to continue speaking?" Job reiterates this again in verse 13.

In verses 6-12, Job issues a warning to his friends of judgment to come for what they are saying. This section was mentioned briefly in my chapter 11 write-up. Job is saying that God will not acquit them if they are using lies and false accusations against Job, even if they are doing so for the purpose of defending and glorifying God. According to Job, the sin of partiality remains a sin even if the object of one's partiality is God himself. I think in verses 11-12 specifically, Job is trying to get them to consider what it would be like if they tried to so accuse him in God's presence, and how much less confidence they would have speaking things like "you deserve worse." Verse 12 is Job's commentary on the endurance and worth of the arguments he is hearing from his friends: about as enduring as ash and brittle as pottery.

Verses 13-14 are a little difficult for me to understand, but we can try to piece some of it together from the context. Job's flesh and his life seem to be synonymous, representing his well-being. His teeth and his hand may represent his own ability to preserve his well-being. If this is the case, then perhaps his teeth are symbolic of the words (i.e., his defense) he desires to speak to God. As it pertains to his hand, the hand is often symbolic in the Bible of one's ability. Just as one example in this same context, verse 21 refers to God's hand as synonymous with his ability or power: "withdraw your hand far from me, and

let not dread of you terrify me.” Whether Job is asking a rhetorical question in verses 13-14 or setting up his answer in the following verses is unclear. If rhetorical, he may mean: “I’m not taking my own well-being into my own hands, I’m putting it in God’s hands because what else can I do?” If setting up an answer in the following verses, it could mean he is justifying a need to be proactive and approach God, as in “I have to do something. Doing nothing isn’t working.”

Verse 15 could be translated either “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” or “Though he slay me, I have no hope.” If Job means that he will hope in God, then it at first seems to contradict Job’s other statements of hopelessness. However, it can be reconciled if Job means it in the sense that he has confidence in what he has reasoned through, as well as confidence in his own innocence, such that he cannot imagine God indicting him of anything wrong. This statement would perhaps be offered up to his friends in contrast to the poor reasoning and partiality he accuses them of practicing. This interpretation also seems to fit well with verse 16: “This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him.” It would also fit well with verses 18-19: “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.” As Job sees it at this point in time, if God would only listen to him, perhaps they could work this out.

In verses 20-22, Job asks two things of God so that he may be able to state his case intelligibly:

- Stop making me suffer
- Let me not be in dread of being in your presence

On a somewhat tangential note, but as we have pointed out a couple of times already, Job seems to again demonstrate a notable self-awareness in that he recognizes his suffering does affect his ability to reason clearly. I believe in verses 20-22, he means for God to relieve him of his suffering so that it does not impede his ability to make his case.

As Reagan did well to point out on Sunday, verse 23 shows Job’s willingness to repent if he would only be shown where he has sinned. This alludes to Job having replayed his life events repeatedly searching for why this has happened to him in case he deserves it. We see even more evidence of this in verse 26 where he recalls the sins of his youth. Perhaps Job is articulating this in front of his friends to demonstrate that he doesn’t need them searching for some error he may have committed – he has not overlooked that possibility. In fact, he has likely exhausted that avenue of thought and found nothing that would justify his suffering; hence his stated confidence in verses 15-19 as noted earlier.

It is also notable in verse 23 that Job’s willingness to repent is unlike the type of character his friends are accusing him of possessing. He just wants to know what he did wrong so he can make it right. In verses 24-25, Job wants to express to God that he does not want to be God’s enemy. And Job compares himself to a driven leaf and dry chaff: these things are so weak that they are no threat to anyone. The way Job sees it, he is making no demands of God. He is only wanting to bring to light whatever is necessary for the problem to be fixed.

Verse 26 – as well as the broader context of Job’s defense – brings to mind Psalm 25:6-15:

- 6 Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
- 7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!
- 8 Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
- 9 He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
- 10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.
- 11 For your name's sake, O Lord,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
- 12 Who is the man who fears the Lord?
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
- 13 His soul shall abide in well-being,
and his offspring shall inherit the land.
- 14 The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
- 15 My eyes are ever toward the Lord,
For he will pluck my feet out of the net.

I think this Psalm well expresses what Job wanted to come of his appeal to God. Note the parallels in Psalm 25 with what is going on with Job:

- Job desires mercy and forgiveness for transgressions that are in the past (Psalm 25:7)
- Job wants God to instruct him if he has sinned, not condemn him (Psalm 25:8)
- Job wants God lead the humble in what is right and be his teacher, not his punisher (Psalm 25:9)
- Job argues he has kept God’s covenant and testimonies (Psalm 25:10)
- Job has done nothing to cause his children to not prosper (Psalm 25:13)
- Job wants God to be his friend (Psalm 25:14)

Now contrast Psalm 25:15 with Job 13:27-28: rather than rescuing his feet from the net, Job sees that God has placed his feet in stocks. The “man” in verse 28 is literally “he” and I believe it refers to the man in stocks; in this case Job specifically.

However, one thing about Job’s plan doesn’t sit quite right with me. And given Job’s reaction later when God answers him, I suspect Job had not totally thought it through. I do not believe Job was being nefarious in my following analysis, but perhaps neglectful of why his plan would not succeed. It struck me that Job is not actually requesting an opportunity to speak to God. He had spoken to God his entire life through prayer. What Job wanted was affirmation that God was listening to him. And if he could meet God face to face, then he would know he had God’s attention. But what could Job even say in that moment that he had not already prayed about? Or even if he had not already prayed about it, he himself acknowledged that God knows the thoughts and intentions of every person and acts accordingly. Those kings, priests, elders, and princes he talked about in chapter 12 are thwarted in their discernment, which necessarily implies God can read their minds – and that Job understood this. So

really, there is no new evidence or case Job could bring to God that God had not already heard from Job's prayers or thoughts (assuming from Job's perspective that God was angry with Job). The only thing to result from Job's request to speak with God is God being placed in a position of having to explain himself to Job's face. I believe the reader is intended to pick up on this, especially considering God's initial statement in chapter 38:3: "Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me" as a reply to Job's statement in chapter 13:22: "Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and you reply to me."

What do you think? Am I off in that assessment?

Next is Job chapter 14, which is another difficult read for me. I look forward to working through it together with you.