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April 19th: Job 17 & Hebrews 9:1-14

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What becomes of Job's hope? Entrance into a new sanctuary.

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Transcript

Job, chapter 17. My spirit is broken, my days are extinct. The graveyard is ready for me.

Surely there are mockers about me, and my eyes dwells on their provocation. Lay down a pledge for me with you. Who is there who will put up security for me? Since you have closed their hearts to understanding, therefore you will not let them triumph.

He who informs against his friends to get a share of their property, the eyes of his children will fail. He has made me a by-word of the peoples, and I am one before whom men spit. My eye has grown dim from vexation, and all my members are like a shadow.

The upright are appalled at this, and the innocent stirs himself against the godless. Yet the righteous holds to his way, and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger. But you, come on again, all of you, and I shall not find a wise man among you.

My days are past, my plans are broken off, the desires of my heart. They make night into day. The light, they say, is near to the darkness.

If I hope for Sheol as my house, if I make my bed in darkness, if I say to the pit, you are my father, and to the worm, my mother or my sister, where then is my hope? Who will see my hope? Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust? Job chapter 17 concludes Job's first speech in the second cycle of dialogues. It is a very complicated passage to understand. Looking through the commentators, it becomes clear that they take greatly varying approaches to almost all of the verses.

There is no clear consensus in how to understand Job's speech here. Although human life is short, and Job's life also, there is no indication that Job's death is immediately imminent. However, at this point, Job might as well be dead.

His continued existence is a form of living death. His life only goes on under the Lord's great condemnation and judgment. He describes his spiritual breath as being broken.

His existence continues, but as it were, he is no longer living. He is surrounded by people who mock him, which is clearly a cause of great grief to him. If he is mocked by the wicked, the sting of God's apparent moral governance of the world being turned upside down will only become more intense for him.

If he is mocked by the righteous, he will feel even more alone in his condition, being rejected and ostracized by people who should be his companions, who should recognize him as one of them. No one seems to be prepared to take his side of the matter, to put up security for him. Once again, Job recognizes God's part in this situation.

He has closed their hearts to understanding. The fact that they don't see is a result of God's acting upon them. The second half of verse 4 may be Job calling upon the Lord not to let those who are standing against him as his accusers triumph.

Verse 5 seems to describe the friends as traitors, as those who have abandoned the true role of a friend. In chapter 6 verses 14-16, for instance, Job had earlier described the friends as like traitors. He who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.

My brothers are treacherous as a torrent bed, as torrential streams that pass away, which are dark with ice, and where the snow hides itself. The meaning of the second half of verse 5 isn't clear. It might be an indication that the treachery of such persons ends up coming back upon them and their families.

The Lord once again is behind all of this. God, who promises on various occasions to make the name of righteous persons a blessing, has made the name of Job a byword among his society. A man once respected and honoured, and enjoying status among them, finds himself spat at and shamed.

With all of his trouble he is wasting away, his eye is dim from his anguish. Verses 8-9 should probably be read as Job's somewhat ironic reference to the people who are accusing him. The people in question are probably upright and innocent, but they mistakenly regard Job as the godless.

Ironically, Job's suffering is causing the righteous to become even more committed to their way. Job is a cautionary tale about ungodliness, a warning about what might happen if people reject the way of truth. Verse 10 is a difficult one to understand.

Perhaps Job is telling his friends to repent and to re-engage with a gentler approach as he has found no wisdom among them. Alternatively, it could be read as a taunt. Norman Harbell argues that verses 11-16 are a cry that together with chapters 16-18 to 17-1 bookends his second major complaint of verses 2-10.

Harbell sees this bookending as having a chiasmic or there-and-back-again structure. The inmost element in both cases in verse 1 and verse 11 is a three-line staccato cry of despair. Verse 12 corresponds with chapter 16 verse 22, the portrait of verses 13-14 with the portrait of verses 20-21 of chapter 16.

The matter of Job's hope is the subject of chapter 16 verse 19 and chapter 17 verse 15. The earth of chapter 16 verse 18 corresponds with the dust and shield of verse 16. As in verse 1, verse 11 describes the devastation of Job's existence.

All of the things that would have given his life meaning have been destroyed or emptied out. Verse 12 is probably a reference to some of the plans that Job had. David Clines proposes the following reading of verses 11 and 12.

My days have passed, broken are my plans, the desires of my heart, which had turned night into day, brought light nearer than darkness. In chapter 14 verses 13-17, Job had wished that he would be hidden in Sheol until the Lord's anger passed. Oh, that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be passed, that you would appoint me a set time and remember me.

If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait till my renewal should come. You would call and I would answer you, you would long for the work of your hands, for then you would 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. Verses 13-16 likely refer back to this hope, to his imagined course of going down to the grave, sheltering there until the appropriate time where he would be raised again and the Lord would vindicate him and he would be restored in his relationship with God.

Yet if Job goes down to the pit and identifies with the grave, calling the grave his father and treating the worm that consumes his rotting flesh as if it were his kin, what then becomes of his hope? Could Job's hope survive the grave? A question to consider. Verses

8-9 probably describe righteous people who are looking at Job's situation, taking him for one of the ungodly and treating him as a cautionary example. They may be righteous but they lack wisdom.

How might we describe the relationship between righteousness and wisdom in scripture? In what ways is it possible for a righteous man, nonetheless, to be lacking in wisdom? Hebrews 9 verses 1-14 Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the presence. It is called the holy place.

Behind the second curtain was a second section, called the most holy place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manor and Aaron's staff that budded and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing, which is symbolic for the present age. According to this arrangement gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Having already contrasted the old and the new high priesthoods, and the covenants corresponding to them, in chapter 9 the author of Hebrews describes the old and the new sanctuaries and the priestly service corresponding with them.

He begins by roughly describing the order of the tabernacle that was constructed according to the plans that were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moving from the high place, with the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the presence, he takes us into the most holy place. The attentive reader of the Old Testament might scratch his head at some of the details here.

The golden altar of incense is not in the most holy place, nor are the manna or Aaron's rod in the Ark of the Covenant. In Exodus 16, verse 34, the manna was seemingly placed before the testimony. In Numbers 17, verse 10, Aaron's rod was also placed in the same location.

In 1 Kings 8, verse 9, we read, There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. We have a number of problems here then, before we move on to consider the meaning of these things. First, how can the author of Hebrews say that the golden altar of incense is inside the most holy place? Second, how can he say that the manna and Aaron's rod are inside the Ark of the Covenant? Most commentators simply say that the details are inaccurate.

However, it is usually the case when reading scripture that seemingly inaccurate or imprecise details are clues to the fact that something more is going on. To the first question concerning the location of the golden altar of incense, some have suggested that it is to an incense burner rather than to the golden altar of incense that Hebrews is referring. This seems tenuous to me.

While it was not unlikely that there was an incense burner in there for the incense brought in, the far more significant piece of furniture was the altar of incense. Another intriguing suggestion is that, with texts such as 1 Kings 6, verse 22 in mind, the author of Hebrews is recognising that, although the golden altar of incense is part of the furniture of the holy place, it is especially tied to the Ark of the Covenant, and in some sense belongs to that part of the tabernacle. It is by means of the altar of incense that one ascends to the most holy place.

You might think of it this way, to which room does the ladder belong, the lower room from which it goes up, or the upper room to which it ascends. Leviticus chapter 16 verses 12-13 gives us some sense of this. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil, and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.

The incense, then, is the means by which one ascends from the lower part, which is the holy place, to the upper part, which is the most holy place. The second question, concerning the location of the manna and the rod, is also challenging. However, even if there is technically imprecision here, it is instructive.

For instance, the golden altar of incense is very clearly connected with the Ark of the Covenant, even though divided from it by the veil, it has to be placed before it. The rod and the manna are placed before the testimonies, connecting them with the tablets of the covenant, not merely the Ark itself, but its contents. The relics of the rod and the

manna were not present in the Ark when it was placed in the inner sanctuary in 1 Kings chapter 8. However, the relics of the rod and the manna might also make us think of the furniture of the holy place.

The holy place contains the altar of incense, which connects to the Ark of the Covenant, with the lampstand and the table of showbread. The most holy place contains the Ark of the testimony, with the rod and the manna. The rod, with its almond blossoms, connects with the lampstand with its almond blossoms.

The manna, the heavenly bread that God provides in the wilderness, connects with the showbread. However, after this teasing glimpse into the tabernacle, the author of Hebrews takes us out once more. Having briefly described the tabernacle, he describes the way that the service of the priest related to the sections of it.

The key term here is first. The priest's service was overwhelmingly in the first section, not in the second. The high priest was the only one who served in the second section, and then only once a year, to take blood on the day of atonement.

The limited access to the second section, though only a replica of the heavenly temple, represented the truth of the lack of access enjoyed by the people to God's special presence. The day of atonement was a feast with eschatological symbolic import. It was an anticipation of the great day of the Lord, when there would be a great division, with some being expelled and others granted full access.

It symbolized the movement from the present age of the first section to the age to come of the second section, when the sins of Israel would be dealt with decisively. The first section of the tabernacle represented the state of the people in the age prior to the work of Christ, a realm of limited access. The day of atonement was essential to the functioning of the entire sacrificial system.

It rebooted it every year. Yet its reality was an eschatological one, a reality awaiting the future, where it would be confirmed and enacted. The entire sacrificial system is contingent upon the future time when, with some greater sacrifice, the Lord would open the way for a passage into His very presence.

This would be achieved not just in some symbolic building, but in heaven itself. The tabernacle order was characterized by fleshly rituals, which couldn't deal with the root problem of the people's hearts, the problem of the old covenant described in the preceding chapter. The symbols of offering always anticipated a greater work to come, and their efficacy rested upon this.

Christ is the one in whom this movement from the first section to the second section, from this present age of the flesh to the age to come, is finally accomplished. He accomplishes this movement not in an earthly model of the true temple, but in the

heavenly reality itself. He enters by means of His own blood, by means of His own self-sacrifice.

It isn't merely the blood of goats and calves, but the true self-offering that the law and its ceremonies always anticipated and awaited. This redemption is not merely a symbolic entry once a year, anticipating some future reality. It is a once-for-all, decisive and complete entry into God's presence.

The author concludes by contrasting the efficacy of the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer, referring to the rite of Numbers chapter 19, which could cleanse and render people richly holy with the blood of Christ. Christ's blood is not merely related to the symbolic cleansing or sanctification of bodies. Such fleshly cleansing or sanctification through sacrifice and washing served as a ritual framework for self-offering to God.

However, Christ performs the perfect self-offering as the mediator of a new covenant. He offers himself up without blemish to God through the eternal spirit, and in the process he deals with the deep downroot problem of the covenant, the sinfulness of human hearts, and successfully brings us into God's very presence. A question to consider, what positive purpose did the tabernacle serve in the author of Hebrew's understanding?