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April 26th: Job 24 & Hebrews 13

April 25, 2021



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Do the wicked sin with impunity? Let us go outside the camp.

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Transcript

Job, chapter 24. Why are not times of judgment kept by the Almighty? Or why do those who know Him never see His days? Some move landmarks, they seize flocks and pasture them, they drive away the donkey of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge, they thrust the poor off the road, the poor of the earth all hide themselves. Behold, like wild donkeys in the desert, the poor go out to their toil seeking game, the wasteland yields food for their children, they gather their fodder in the field, and they glean the vineyard of the wicked man.

They lie all night naked without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for lack of shelter. There are those who snatch the fatherless child from the breast, and they take a pledge against the poor.

They go about naked without clothing, hungry they carry the sheaves. Among the olive

rows of the wicked they make oil. They tread the winepresses, but suffer thirst.

From out of the city the dying groan, and the soul of the wounded cries for help. Yet God charges no one with wrong. There are those who rebel against the light, who are not acquainted with its ways, and do not stay in its paths.

The murderer rises before it is light, that he may kill the poor and needy, and in the night he is like a thief. The eye of the adulterer also waits for the twilight, saying, No eye will see me. And he veils his face.

In the dark they dig through houses. By day they shut themselves up. They do not know the light, for deep darkness is mourning to all of them, for they are friends with the terrors of deep darkness.

You say, swift are they on the face of the waters. Their portion is cursed in the land. No treader turns toward their vineyards.

Drought and heat snatch away the snow waters. So does Sheol those who have sinned. The womb forgets them.

The worm finds them sweet. They are no longer remembered. So wickedness is broken like a tree.

They wrong the barren childless woman, and do no good to the widow. Yet God prolongs the life of the mighty by his power. They rise up when they despair of life.

He gives them security, and they are supported, and his eyes are upon their ways. They are exalted a little while, and then are gone. They are brought low and gathered up like all others.

They are cut off like the heads of grain. If it is not so, who will prove me a liar, and show that there is nothing in what I say? Job chapter 24 presents the reader with a number of difficulties. Francis Anderson summarizes the problems.

First, there are lots of knotty textual difficulties. Secondly, there is the apparent incoherence of the speech as it stands. Thirdly, parts of the speech seem to be out of keeping with what Job has argued elsewhere and with his position more generally.

The anomalous elements of this chapter have led some scholars to consider them in light of anomalous features of the third cycle of speeches more generally. There is, for instance, no final speech of Zophar the Naamathite, who spoke last in the preceding two cycles. Bildad's speech is also very short.

Job's concluding speech, by contrast, is exceedingly long. Cyril Rodd, for instance, argues that this is evidence, that the text is unfinished or otherwise at odds with the author's intention. Gerald Janssen, remarking upon this possibility, observes, perhaps there is

something to be said for leaving an ancient work partly in ruins and for allowing each reader to reconstruct the outlines of the original edifice with the use of one's own imagination, informed as it may become through careful study of what still remains intact.

Some have speculated that material from one or both of the speeches of Bildad or a missing speech of Zophar has ended up here. David Clines holds the latter position and moves verses 18 to 24 to follow chapter 27, verse 17. Others have argued that there might be a mixture of material from disparate sources here and no real unity.

While highlighting these questions, Anderson presents a reading of the passage that, without ironing over its difficulties, invites the reader to read it as it stands. However, other commentators have taken different approaches. As already noted, Clines reads verses 18 to 24 as not belonging to the speech but being wrongly transposed into it from elsewhere.

He mentions Duhem and Forer as holding the position that the chapter is in fact a series of independent poems. Others have suggested that the chapter may be a poem written by the author of the book, punctuating the text and drawing together some of its themes. John Hartley largely maintains the text as it stands and reads the whole thing as the words of Job while making some minor changes like transposing verse 9, which is placed in parentheses in the ESV translation, to before verse 4. Norman Harville argues for the literary unity of the chapter but believes that it should likely be seen as the words of Zophar, observing what he believes are parallels with the themes of Zophar's statements in chapter 20, and that the coherence of the passage may better be understood if we appreciate that Zophar is making a few concessions along the way.

He argues that if we look at some of the features of the opening verses of the chapter and compare those with the closing ones, we will see enough parallels and connections to substantiate a literary unity to the whole. Other commentators raise even further possibilities. Once again, not without their problems.

Some have read verses 18-24 as extended quotations by Job of his friends or accusers. Anderson suggests that most of the final verses might even be read as an imprecation or curse. Reading it as an imprecatory appeal for God's justice in such a situation, rather than a declaration of the way that things usually work, would definitely be more in keeping with what we have seen of Job's position to this point.

Janssen argues that there is in fact a quotation, but it is only verses 18-20, with the verses that follow being Job's response. He remarks more generally upon the problems that we can find in these concluding chapters of the third cycle. There is another possibility which, though it is not here adopted, may be mentioned simply to enlarge the reader's sense of the options.

It may be that the author has deliberately dissolved the otherwise orderly sequence of statements and counter-statements into a confused tangle of incoherent voices, a formal way of paralleling the argument of Job that the hedge against chaos has given way and that disorder and evil in the world make clear understandings impossible. Such a device would admirably prepare the way for the sceptical statement in chapter 28, before Job recovers himself with the integrative verbal actions of chapters 29-31. Of the positions on offer, I am more inclined to go with Andersen and Janssen in reading the whole chapter as a unity and as the words of Job.

With Janssen, I lean towards taking verses 18-20 as Job's quotation of his friends, with the verses that follow being Job's own response. Harbell argues that verses 1-17 are Zophar's presentation of the problem that he is going to address in the verses that follow. Along the way, he is making some concessions to Job's position, recognising some validity in what he is seeing.

I would argue rather that we would be better off reading these as the words of Job throughout. Job is again presenting the problem of divine justice but broadening it. The friends have been talking about the fate of the wicked and he is broadening the question somewhat, to relate to the problem of the Lord's justice not being forthcoming not just in his own case but in numerous cases of oppression more generally.

Verses 2-4 describe actions of the oppressors, moving landmarks, to take property that is not their own, sheep stealing, oppressing widows and orphans by requiring the animals by which they would make their living as a pledge. Thrusting the poor off the road may be a way of speaking about squeezing them out of the economy. The result of this oppression is described in the verses that follow.

In verses 5-11, the oppressed poor can barely scavenge enough to survive. They suffer from exposure to the elements. They are hungry and thirsty.

While the wicked are prospering, the poor that they are oppressing have to glean what scant remnants they can from the fields and vineyards of the wicked. Where is God in all of this? The oppressed, the dying, the wounded are crying out and yet no one seems to listen to them. God does not seem to remember them in their plight.

The Lord had forbidden these specific forms of oppression within the law but he doesn't seem to be acting to enforce the justice that he prescribes. Verses 13-17 describe the oppressors themselves. They are in this portrayal figures associated with darkness.

The murderer, the thief and the adulterer are all figures who operate by night. They may break the three greatest commandments of the second table of the law yet God does not seem to act against them. The darkness being referred to here doesn't merely relate to literal darkness.

It seems to also relate to the darkness that exists in the absence of divine justice. Where God's actions in bringing the wicked to account are not seen, there is darkness. And this darkness, Job argues, is a cover for the wicked.

They take refuge in this darkness while the righteous long for it to be broken with the advent of the days of the Lord. The difficult closing section of the chapter, verses 18-24 particularly, are, I believe, best read as Jansen reads them. Verses 18-20 is a quote of the position of the friends.

Jansen remarks that Job has already quoted his friends in places like chapter 21, verses 19 and possibly verse 22. The statement concerns the certainty of the judgement that will befall the wicked. The grave will seize them just as naturally as drought and heat melt up the snow waters.

They will be consumed in their graves and forgotten by the land of the living. Yet Job, hearkening back to the portrayal of the wicked oppressor within this chapter, points out that they can do all these forms of oppression and yet their lives are prolonged. They seem to be given security by God.

Yes, their life is short, but when they die, they die just like anyone else. Despite all of their oppression, they do not seem to be singled out in any particular way. Far from being cut down by the Lord, they leave just like the righteous.

Job concludes by challenging the friends to oppose the position. If he is indeed wrong in his claims, he wants them to prove it. What is he missing or misrepresenting? A question to consider.

In this chapter, Job's consideration of his condition opens up to a broader consideration of the condition of the righteous and the wicked more generally. Where else have we seen this happening to this point and how do Job's particular struggles give us a vantage point upon the problem of evil and the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked more generally? Hebrews chapter 13 Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Remember those who are in prison, as though imprisoned with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me? Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat, for the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp, and bear the reproach He endured, for here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.

Do not neglect to do good, and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy, and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this, in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen. I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.

In Hebrews 13, the final chapter of the book, there are concluding exhortations, and the author sums up the message of the book. It begins with four pairs of exhortations, with reasons attached to the first, third and fourth. The first pair is, let brotherly love continue, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, and the reason attached, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The second, remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, followed by the other part of the pair, and those who are mistreated, since you are also in the body. The third pair, let marriage be held in honour among all, and the second part of that pair, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, the attached reason, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. The final pair is, keep your life free from love of money, the second part being, and be content with what you have, with the reason

attached, for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

These exhortations largely expand the opening exhortation, let brotherly love continue. He is exhorting them to continue in behaviours of brotherly love, and to refrain from behaviours against brotherly love. It's interesting to consider that these are the fitting responses to the message of the book.

Much of it gives attention to the life of the community of the people of God. We are members of the same household. If we have the same father, we should treat each other as brothers and sisters.

This is not just about individual ethics. Continued love towards brothers must be accompanied by love towards strangers, in the form of hospitality. The author of Hebrews plays upon the word, love for brothers, with the word that he uses for love for strangers.

It could be very easy to love the brothers, and do so in a way that ignores strangers. He observes that some of those who have exercised such hospitality towards strangers, have entertained angels unawares. This might naturally be seen as a reference to Genesis chapter 18 and 19, as the angels that go to inspect Sodom, are entertained first by Abraham and then later by Lot.

We might also think of Matthew chapter 25, where Jesus speaks of a sort of test of hospitality, as persons later described as his brethren, are ministered to and served by various others. And on the basis of their welcome of his brothers, they are blessed. Christ identifies with his brothers.

He comes incognito in the poor, the person who needs a drink, the person who needs to be visited in prison. The love that should be shown to people of the household of faith, needs to overflow to those outside. And Christ coming incognito in his servants, presents a sort of judgment that comes unawares upon a people.

Sodom, like the villages and towns of Israel later in the story of Christ, is tested with a secret test. They do not know the time of their visitation, and yet they are judged according to their treatment of those who came to them when they were unawares. They are called to associate with those in prison, or being tortured, particularly those who are suffering for their faith.

Marriage is to be held in a special honour. This is a more general, cultural and social commitment to the institution of marriage. It's not just for the married, but for everyone.

Marriage is particularly important to uphold. It requires an honouring of the commitment to marriage, a restriction of sexual relations to the marriage bed, the ordinary expectation that people will get married. While there is no sin per se in not getting married, and the married should not be seen as above the unmarried, there is a special

honour in the institution of marriage, and that meaning of marriage must be guarded and protected and celebrated.

It is not just to be a private commitment for married persons. It is not just about affirming the married as individuals. It's about a social value that all of us must maintain.

And the positive exhortation here is followed by a negative counterpart. The marriage bed should not be defiled. In employing the language of defilement, the marriage bed is being implicitly presented as if it were holy.

This holiness must be maintained by the marriage partners, and also by everyone else around them. The author of Hebrews particularly focuses here upon the judgment on the sexually immoral. Just as there was a positive exhortation followed by a negative exhortation in the commandment concerning marriage, now there is a negative exhortation followed by a positive counterpart concerning greed.

Greed is extremely dangerous, and contentment is necessary. If the reason given for avoiding defiling the marriage bed was God's judgment upon adulterers and the sexually immoral, here the reason given for contentment is God's blessing of his continued presence. There is probably an allusion here to statements given by Moses to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31, verse 8, and it's followed by a quotation from Psalm 118, verse 6. The fact that the New Testament so often and so consistently focuses upon these two particular sins, upon sexual immorality and greed, probably has a lot to say to our particular age.

Verses 7 and 17 contain exhortations about leaders. They must learn from past leaders and learn from present leaders. The author here also sums up the key thrust of the book to persevere.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. He is the eternal Son. He is faithful in all times and in all generations.

He does not change. He is the same one to whom people looked in times past, and the same one that people will look to in the future. He is a fitting guarantee of all of God's promises and the definitive and enduring Word of God.

This message about the eternity of Christ has been throughout the book of Hebrews. There is, however, the danger of novel teaching leading people astray from Christ. The alternative to being led away is for the heart to be strengthened.

Foods like the rituals of the tabernacle were utterly powerless to deal with the core issue of the heart. We have an altar, a table to participate in, perhaps something symbolized by the Eucharist. Ongoing participation in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ is necessary.

We should contrast this with those who remain in the way of the Old Covenant after

Christ has come. There is a danger of giving up the riches received in Christ by continuing to go back to something that has no life in it, no future in it. The sin offering, which was most particularly associated with the day that anticipated the eschatological passage into the New Age, had more specific regulations for its sacrifices.

The bodies of the animals had to be disposed of very carefully after their blood had been used. Leviticus chapter 16 verse 27. And the bull for the sin offering, and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be carried outside the camp.

Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire. The animals whose blood accomplished the movement from the first section to the inner section of the tent were burned outside of the camp. Christ also suffered outside of the gate according to this same pattern.

It's the place of rejection, of exclusion, and of shame. And there is no meal for that particular sin offering. In chapter 10 of Leviticus, the priests ate the sin offerings of the people.

In some respect, they bore the sin of Israel in doing this. Leviticus chapter 10 verses 16 to 18. Now Moses diligently inquired about the goat of the sin offering, and behold it was burned up.

And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamah, the surviving sons of Aaron, saying, Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy, and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord? Behold, its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You certainly ought to have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded. That sacrifice involved going outside of the camp to burn up the animal in a clean place.

In Leviticus chapter 6 verse 30, sin offerings whose blood was brought into the holy places had their flesh prohibited for eating. The fact that we can eat the sin offering of Christ, that we can eat the sacrifice on that particular altar, suggests that we have a far holier status than we ever did before, a far holier status than the priests even did in the old covenant. They could eat some of the sacrifices for the sin offering that were offered by the people, but they could not eat any of the sin offerings whose blood was brought into the holy places.

However, in Christ we can. This suggests that we have a far higher status. There is a new form of sacrificial worship.

It involves a sacrifice of praise, with the fruit of lips offered up to the Lord. Animal and vegetable sacrifices symbolize continuing human sacrifices, the ways that we offer our

bodies and our lives and our lips. The sacrificial service of good deeds and charity is also mentioned here.

The person who gives to the poor lends to the Lord. It is a form of sacrificial worship that God truly desires. In verse 17, he speaks of the importance of obeying and submitting to leaders.

They keep watch over our souls and they must give an account to God, and it is important to give them joy by being responsive to their service. The mutual benefit of good leaders and responsive people under their leadership must be recognized. Leadership is a collaborative task.

We must be those who are able to be led, and we must be those who have good leaders over us. Although the book has more of the character of a sermon, it ends in a similar manner to other letters. There is a request for prayer, there is a blessing, exhortation, travel plans, and final greetings.

In verse 20, we might hear an allusion to Isaiah chapter 63, verses 11 to 14. Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert they did not stumble.

Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest. So you led your people to make for yourself a glorious name. In this allusion, once again, he sets up Jesus and Moses alongside each other.

Jesus, the one who brought up his people from the dead through his resurrection. He is the new shepherd of the sheep. If Moses was like a shepherd of the sheep, he is the one who led the flock to Mount Sinai in the first occasion, and then later the flock of Israel to Mount Sinai.

And now, much as Moses led the flock of Israel through the wilderness, opening up the passage of the seas so that they could travel through and bringing them to Mount Sinai, Christ has brought us to a better mountain. Christ has torn open the abyss of death so that we might walk through on dry ground. We must have the courage of faith to go out to him, being prepared to face the rejection and exclusion that we'll suffer as we're associated with Christ, and bearing his reproach, to look towards a better country, to be those who despise the shame because of the glory that is set before us.

We don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews, but the reference to Timothy suggests that it may have been, if not Paul, someone of his party. A question to consider, what might the author of Hebrews mean by the expression, by the blood of the eternal

covenant?