

JOB 22-31

Eliphaz and Bildad Speak. Job answers. In chapters 29-31, Job completes his defense. What remains is to wait for an answer from the One who alone has an answer to the questions – God.

22, 25 In these chapters Job's friends continue to question Job's integrity in terms even more blatant than previously (22:5-11). Job must have done everything the most wicked do. He has been greedy and cruel to his family and to the vulnerable of society. Moreover, he has presumed in his arrogance that God would not notice or act to condemn him (22: 12-20). Job's only hope is to repent and accept God's condemnation as deserved. He must offer sacrifices of contrition to God in order to be restored (22: 21-30). Finally, Job is reminded that before God no one is righteous (25). Everyone is guilty. He should stop his rant against God on behalf of his innocence and just get on his knees and admit his guilt. God is never in the wrong, humans are. By suffering as he is Job has been addressed by God.

23,24,26,27 In these chapters Job responds to his friends again. The themes are familiar, but his expression continues to be creatively raw.

- He has an irrational hope that God will answer his questioning. He is being unfairly treated and only God can vindicate him and declare the truth of his innocence (23: 1-12). No one else believes him, not even his closest friends and family.
- But God's only communication at this point is to continue to terrify Job in every way. God is merciless (23: 13-17).
- Job's experience of suffering also draws him close to all those who suffer in the world (24). Where in the past he would have been sympathetic to the poor and unfortunate in a paternalistic, charitable way, now he knows that experience in a first-hand way. Life is unfair, the world is unfair. There is no moral order to the universe. The wicked get away with murder. The innocent suffer through no fault of their own.
- God is all powerful, but given the way things happen in the world, God's power is a terror rather than a source of comfort and assurance (26).
- Job refuses to concede to his friends' diagnosis of what's wrong and how it can be righted (27). He maintains his "integrity." (v.5) Clearly this refers to his refusal to accept that he deserves his misfortune and suffering because he has done wrong. Even though he can't prove his innocence, and even though God is all-powerful and cannot be called to account by anyone, Job is in the right and God is in the wrong. And his friends are in the wrong for taking God's side over his.

28 Where is wisdom and understanding to be found once it is discovered that the world and what happens to humans in it makes little sense? One may discover gold and other precious stones and minerals in the earth. But wisdom? God knows where it is, but humans do not. God

has declared to humans that “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” (28) This is very much the wisdom of Proverbs. But the facts don’t substantiate this declaration in much of Job’s reality.

29-31 In these three chapters Job completes his defense. He finishes his arguments. All that’s left is for God to answer. This is his plea. This is his hope. In 29, Job recalls the life he once lived not so long ago. He was respected far and wide and his success and prosperity were signs of God’s blessing. People consulted him for his wisdom. He arbitrated in conflicts. He was generous to the helpless and needy.

In 30, Job focuses on the present and how things have so radically changed. Even the children of his servants mock and disdain him. His suffering and misfortune have turned him into a repulsive sight, one from whom everyone wants to keep their distance. Job has been humiliated in the most absolute way, and he has lost his status completely. Whatever he did in the past, however generous and just he lived, none of that is remembered or honoured any longer.

In 31, Job maintains the basis of his integrity in greater detail than ever before. Job has been faithful and loyal in his commitments in every way. He has been faithful to his wife. He has been generous and caring to the orphan and widow (the most vulnerable in society). He has always been attentive to the concerns of his servants. He never took his wealth for granted but shared it and gave thanks for it. He never wished ill on anyone, even upon his enemies.

For all these reasons, Job is begging, pleading, crying out for an answer from God. Only God can vindicate him. Only God can set things right. Only God can explain why it is Job has been visited with calamity, and only God can explain why the world is not governed by a moral justice. Job can now only sit and wait, in hope, however futile it all seems...

Have you ever had to wait like Job? Did you give up or has something within you continued to persevere in seeking after a deeper wisdom about truth, justice and hope?

Acceptance is essential in life, especially when difficult things come upon us we cannot control or change. But is acceptance always right? What about resistance? Where is the place for protest that will not give up that keeps our spirits alive and open to new understanding and new direction in a situation or conflict?

Think about the image of God Job and his friends have. A God of reward and punishment, lacking in forgiveness or grace for those who make mistakes (You only get what you deserve), and one with whom relationship is based on fear (afraid) of God’s power rather than gratitude for a love that is deep, wide and steadfast. You only know a God of such love when you have felt embraced in your vulnerability, brokenness and moral failure. Will Job ever meet such a God? We wait to see.