

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Job 16

16.1-2. "Miserable comforters." The things which were expressed in the previous chapter are common knowledge. Worse still, possibly, he had tortured himself with some of these very things if Satan were following up his attack by affecting his thoughts in the lowliness of his experience. "Forgers of lies; physicians of no value," he had called them earlier (13.4). There are body creams, the soothing benefits of which may be felt the moment they are applied to the smarting skin. But if they inflame still further, being wrongly prescribed, then how they add unbearable suffering to the already excruciating pain. Such was the "comfort" of the friends and it caused misery.

True comfort comes from "the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Corinthians 1.3-4). That comfort is conveyed by the Holy Spirit. The Saviour said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth...I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14.16,17,18). Had they known that comfort in reality, they would have been equipped to comfort Job.

When the Lord Jesus Christ quoted Hosea 6.6 "I desired mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9.13; 12.7) it was that the guiltless should not be condemned. The Saviour was not saying that the Father does not desire sacrifice, for He Himself was to be the sacrifice to make atonement for His people's sin, which must be finished, accomplished if His people are to be saved. David expresses it finely in Psalm 51.16,19. "Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise...then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness". Christ's atoning sacrifice is an act of supreme mercy. Mercy was in His heart before Calvary. Those who benefit from His saving work will delight to show mercy. And in the case of the friends, who as yet know not saving grace, and in the case of the Pharisees of Matthew 12.7 even if they are opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah, they should still have shown the mercy which God desires, from their understanding of prophecy. Mercy assuages grief and pain; it eases the wounds.

16.3. When there is nothing to be said, or when someone has nothing of consequence to say, "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom" (13.5). The friends had kept silence for seven days and seven nights (2.13), so they knew the golden virtue of

silence. It was Satan, pursuing his frequent strategy of separating between chief friends (Proverbs 16.28), who emboldened them.

16.4-5. David, perhaps drawing on his knowledge of the book of Job, by the Holy Spirit's guidance says, of false witnesses, "they laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But, as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting..." (Psalm 35.11-13). The hymnwriter beautifully expresses it:-

Behold the love, the generous love,
That gracious David shows:
See how his strong emotions move
For his afflicted foes.

When they are sick his soul complains,
And seems to feel the smart;
The spirit of the gospel reigns,
And melts his kindly heart.

How did his strong concerns condole
As for a loved one dead!
And fasting mortified his soul,
While for their life he prayed.

O glorious type of heavenly grace!
Thus Christ the Lord appears;
While sinners curse, the Saviour prays,
And pities them with tears.

This would also be an excellent time to read Psalm 41.

16.6-7. The weariness spoken of here is of utter prostration and Job acknowledges that it is the Lord's doing. Concerning "weariness" that great commentator on the book of Job, Joseph Caryl, says, "a man who walks into the air, to refresh himself may come home weary" – but, of course, refreshed. This weariness is such as when physical and emotional resources have been dangerously drained. It is as if Job addresses first Eliphaz (but referring to the Lord) and then turns to the Lord Himself. "**He**" hath made me weary: "**thou**" hast made desolate all my company." Job is so inexpressibly weary that words will not bring any relief; but neither is he helped by remaining silent, for thoughts are still roaming constantly through his mind.

There are Christian businessmen down the years who have lost their investments, perhaps on the ocean, or in many other ways who have been enabled to give God the glory by exclaiming "thou hast made desolate all my company." It is not a business company, of course, that Job has in mind. But all his assets; all his friends; all his relatives who remain (including his wife) and his neighbours (19.13-19).

16.8. In the presence of Eliphaz (and the others) Job berates the Lord, but comes far short of cursing him, which is what Satan needed him to do in order to prove his point against God.

One can imagine Satan egging him on, hoping that he will cross that line and curse God. But even if that were true, then the restraining influences of the Lord are hiddenly at work and he does not, in fact, cross that line. In other words, he has stumbled but not in such a way as not to get up again and continue in the faith.

16.9. Now, after this outburst, he speaks once again directly to Eliphaz (and the friends) for the remainder of the chapter. In the midst of the years believers may come to wrong conclusions about their state. Jacob said, “all these things are against me” (Genesis 42.36) when it was not at all as he thought. Joseph and Simeon were very much alive. As Joseph later explained to his brothers, “God did send me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45.5). Job’s assessment is likewise wrong; and our own may sometimes also be mistaken. So far from hating Job, God had declared His confidence in him before Satan and declared him perfect, that is, in virtue of imputed righteousness.

16.10-11. The words of Job, the Edomite, granted him here by the Holy Spirit to give true expression to his neighbours’ voyeurism, were taken up in the same way of inspiration by David in Psalm 22.13 to describe prophetically a portion of the Saviour’s literal sufferings, as well as David’s own, though in his case perhaps described metaphorically. Indeed, the smiting on the cheek is not mentioned in Psalm 22, but is fulfilled in Matthew 26.67 and the whole of the second half of this verse and the entirety of verse 11 were fulfilled in the Saviour’s humiliation then. Of course, Job didn’t understand it at the time, it was all unbeknown to him; but how greatly the Lord was honouring him by giving him such words, especially so soon after his outburst of verse 9! While it is true that Job did not curse God or man, the words of James are a timely warning, “The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3.8-10).

It would be more accurate, perhaps, to reflect how rapidly, in the space of a few words, the Lord has fulfilled the truth of the words later revealed in Psalm 76 10 “Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” However, we may also reflect that there may be many wonderful things which the Lord is doing for others through our lives, our words, our presence all unbeknown to us. May we pray that it indeed be so. If others see something of the precious Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, in us, what a wonderful crowning glory that is to our lives, even if as yet we know it not. “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him...and honour him” (Psalm 91.14-15)

Oh, honour higher, truer far
Than earthly fame could bring,
Thus to be used in work like this,
So long, for such a King!

A hand almighty to defend,
An ear for every call,
An honoured life, a peaceful end,
And heaven to crown it all!

16.12. In the midst of Job's alarms, our own alarms, it was good to pause and reflect a moment on the rich weight of glory the Lord is working for us behind the scenes (2 Corinthians 4.17-18). "I was at ease." There is no reason to think that Job was sinfully at ease, as in Amos 6.1, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." They were putting off the evil day by feasting and wantonness, but were not grieved for sin and were ripe for destruction. That sort of ease does, in fact, soon descend upon the self-satisfied and the self-righteous. But Job means that the seasons were passing by regularly and profitably in a well-timetabled life.

16.12-14. In a series of illustrations Job describes his felt sense of affliction. Taken by the neck and shaken. A target for arrow practice. Sometimes there is a bullseye and his innermost being is pierced and his anguish poured out. A wall bombarded time and time again. A huge opponent in battle charging with momentum.

16.15-17. At this point Job moves from figurative language to actual to describe how abject his condition is. Well, almost. He uses the word "horn" as such a familiar term that it is almost figurative no longer. But, of course, men do not have horns. Animals' horns are used to express dominance through physical prowess. So Job, perhaps, implies that though he be covered with sore boils yet the very sackcloth irritates and compounds his miserable itching. His natural strength and prowess is laid low. He does not anoint himself with oil to make his body shine; it is dry and scaling, perhaps weeping in many places, and he dwells in the open air among the clouds of dust. The tears begrime his face still further; and the expression of his features is of a dying man.

But, he hastens to add, he knows of no injustice as its cause. If there had been any, he believed it to have been covered by the blood of the sacrifice. His conscience testified to him that he was without guile when he prayed – seeking the best interests of others and not his own selfish prosperity.

16.18-19. I wonder if Jeremiah, in some respects a kindred spirit to Job, was recalling these words under divine guidance as he uttered his famous expression "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord" (Jeremiah 22.29). Jeremiah calls the earth to record that, so far from being an honoured man, in the sense we have thought of above, Coniah the king was a despised, broken idol, a vessel wherein is no pleasure to God. It all harks back to Genesis 4.10 when the Lord spoke to Cain, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."

The earth, though inanimate (although much grows in it) is addressed in the name of the Lord. The Saviour spoke to the winds and the waves and they obeyed him. Here is Job's impassioned prayer to the Lord (though the earth is addressed) that he might not die, that he might be healed and cry out no longer; which happened in due time.

Though still addressing the earth, again he is in reality crying unto the Lord, "I know you see me and can bear testimony to my innocence." When earth's accusations are severe and Satan maligns, it is well with us if we have confidence to declare, "My witness is in heaven, and my

record is on high.” Our CV, together with life’s history, is safely lodged in the vaults of heaven, hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3.3), and we do well to appeal to such a Saviour.

16.20. That Job is indeed praying is clarified here. His very tears, he says, are prayers. David beautifully and poignantly elaborates in Psalm 56.8 “put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” which is surely the Spirit’s allusion to Job, for this is what happens to the godly tears of His people. Never mind the scorning even of friends and family; weeping is profitable when it is as unto God like this. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30.5).

16.21. “O that one might plead for a man with God.” This is the very thing that mere God-fearers deny. They merely hope they have a hope and avow no intimacy with such a God and Saviour; going further, they often maintain that those who do make such a profession are by definition deceived.

We may plead for ourselves and we may plead for others. If salvation through Christ means one thing, and it means many, it means that we have access to God. “...through our Lord Jesus Christ...we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5.1-2). We are bidden to come to Him through his only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The argument is from the lesser to the greater. If it is a kindly and merciful thing to intercede for a neighbour with success when he is accused, perhaps falsely; how much more is it possible to have access to God for others and for ourselves, and a merciful thing in God to allow such intercession and be persuaded by it.

16.22. As with us all, the number of Job’s days are appointed (14.5). At times Job thinks his life is almost over; this represents a slight lifting of the mist and suggests that he can see there may be even a few years ahead. More than that are appointed for him, we know now; but he didn’t know then. We cannot retrace our paths after death; we cannot retrace them before death. Mostly, we wouldn’t like to go through all life’s experiences again. Let us seek the Lord’s richest blessing of fruitfulness upon the present.

If Job is to experience tokens of justification before men (he knows he is actually justified); if his prayers are to be answered; if he is to be healed - all these things must come soon for, as far as he can see, he has not long to live. These words are added in Job’s thinking as an urgent sigh for the fulfilment of all his hopes and prayers in the sight of God.