

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 19

19.1-3. In chapters 8 and 18 Bildad had commenced with “How long?” Now Job retorts to Bildad in his turn “How long?” The implication that Job is indeed the wicked man to whom he was referring in verses 5 onwards, and of Eliphaz before him in 15.20-35, has vexed and broken him up within. His emotions have been churned by their reproaches. These comforters were his familiar friends and now, through Satan’s malice, they have hardened away all thoughts of friendship by the bitterness with which they have defended their theological cause and made accusations, justified on their foundations, but, in reality, false.

19.4. Because of his innate certainty concerning the way in which the Lord has led him, Job has been prepared to hazard his all (13.14-15) on a direct plea to Him not explicitly for mercy but for justification. Now, he maintains, the outcome is purely between God and himself. If he is in error, he trusts the Lord for pardon. There is no need for his friends to take personal offence. Even if their pleading is a genuine one for Job’s welfare their premise is false and their method hurtful, and therefore counter-productive.

19.5-6. The “if” of verse 5 is a big “if.” It introduces the whole section as far as verse 20. He does not grant that which he supposes. He supposes it rather than affirms it. As if he meant that supposing all their worst implications, then God has brought to pass these terrible things in judgment and not given me a hearing. That cannot be right. Terrible things from God have certainly overcome him. But not in judgment.

19.7. Surely it cannot be in judgment, for that would be a terrible wrong if he is not granted a hearing to plead his case. He cannot think that of God. Surely he might ask to plead his case directly. If it be judgment then let him appear in God’s court. The Judge must decide guilt or otherwise not men.

19.8. The things which Job goes on to narrate from verses 13-20 are undoubtedly true. It is the reason for them, how they are to be interpreted, which is at issue. If it be that God is dealing with him in judgment then verses 8-12 have to be the interpretation. It is clear that Job did wonder if that was the case, but he held to his conscience and his faith.

It is good theology to speak of being “fenced up” when true believers are seeking the way forward as they interpret the providences of God. Should they seek this opportunity, this university, this job, this home? Constraining factors of one sort and another may so surround that, perhaps unwillingly, the believer is forced to conclude that his strength is to sit still (Isaiah 30.7).

However, Job, while seeking to evaluate the Lord's providential dealings with him, knows that the next move cannot be his except by prayer that he might understand what is going on, what is required of him for his part. So he sets out the parameters with which the Lord has "fenced" him in.

It is clearly a way of limitation by health; just to survive is a path of great difficulty; it is darkness.

19.9-10. What is he to make of his status in the eyes of the world? His authority (glory) has been removed and the honour due to his position as husband, father, and ruler (over his family and over Edom) tarnished. He has been disqualified and therefore dismissed from office in each of these spheres and with the passing of these outward things has also vanished his inward hopes, ideals maybe, for himself and for them.

19.11-19. In his mind his thoughts stray to thinking that God has turned against him in anger, for no reason. Hence, whenever the scriptures speak of harm done to a believer "without a cause" this is the line of providential reasoning which should be employed. The answer given to Job, the end of Job, will be the believer's outcome. The troops of the Lord with which he is surrounded are the various expressions of the providential dealings of which he gives a selection in the next few verses. Friends, kinsfolk, servants, the neighbourhood children, even his most intimate friends reject him and he can do nothing to alter the cause of their rejection; though the friends who believe that his own secret evil has precipitated all this think he can.

To be deserted by those whom you love is one of life's bitterest agonies. The anguish of mind and the sense of utter rejection, for one's best, one's very capacity to love is esteemed a thing which can be easily cast off, is utterly debilitating. It is a poignant expression which the Holy Spirit has surely used to comfort many.

19.20. Finally, his health constrains him. From being fit and healthy he is now skin and bones. It would be good to read again 16.10-16 and see the depth of his condition. In principle (but, for example, without literal sackcloth) this is a small indication of what the Lord Jesus Christ suffered to make atonement for His people on Calvary 1500 years later. Job's conclusion in 16.16-17 still animates him at this point in chapter 19, "My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure".

"I am escaped with the skin of my teeth" has become part of the English language, meaning with virtually nothing. Though happily translated, the credit must go to the Hebrew language, and, of course, to the Holy Spirit's use of those faculties with which He had endowed Job. From the woeful conditions of this chapter come such a wonderful expression used by us all and the still greater benefits of the words which follow.

19.21-22. In a moment, under the mighty power of the Holy Spirit and with a great sense of the release which freedom brings, Job is going to break free for a moment from friends and focus entirely upon his God. One last appeal to the comforters must suffice that they should pity him as he is carried along by the Holy Spirit to utter that which has governed the thinking and the faith of the Lord's saints down the ages.

It is central to Job's thinking concerning the conveying of comfort to the afflicted that pity is of the essence. "To him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty" (6.14). Once again, he pleads with them to think mercifully. God has touched him. "The hand of God" (another expression which has come down into our language) has touched him. The comforters are not God. They should leave God to do His work, whatever it is, and fulfil the human role of kindness. His physical state should evoke pity not revulsion; a revulsion animated by the false notion that the distortion of the body is but a mirror reflection of what is going on inside a man.

19.23. "Oh that my words were now written!" Well, they are. Here in Job 19.23 and, of course, throughout. They have been printed many thousands of times. Maybe, if Job himself was the author of this book, he was even permitted himself to write them by the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes our prayers are so full that they can scarcely be expressed they are so vast. An "oh!" prayer says it all before our God who knows the ramifications of the human heart. Such a prayer is Psalm 20 which asks magnificent and far-reaching things and might well have been prefixed by an "oh!" "The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee;...remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice...grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel...the LORD fulfil all thy petitions" (Psalm 20.1-5).

19.24. Engraved with lead speaks of permanence, but speaks of one only. There was only one Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7.12), and there is no record that there was an inscription upon it. There was no inscription at Bethel (Genesis 28.19). The worldwide distribution of these words down the ages has fulfilled these words much more thoroughly, much more wonderfully.

19.25. There is only one Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man. His people are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1.6). Seeing that Job speaks of his Redeemer then it must be the Lord Jesus Christ. Similarly David speaks of his Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, in Psalm 110.1, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool". The Saviour Himself said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11.25-26)

Furthermore he says "I know." That is to say it is not a vague hope, or a supposition, but a certainty engraved on his mind and in his heart that he had been granted a share in the redemption which the Saviour alone could accomplish once and for all, in years to come, on Calvary. It was personal. Now that we know, in New Testament times, the identity of that Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, how shameful it is that many cannot attain to what Job believed all those centuries ago, to be able to say, "I know".

Additionally, it had been revealed to Job that this Redeemer was now alive ("he liveth") and shall be alive ("he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth"). In other words that the Saviour is from everlasting to everlasting.

Certainly there is a double interpretation of prophecy here. In the first place the Saviour will walk this earth as a man and die on Calvary and rise again.

But because Job speaks of resurrection day, the primary significance of this prophecy is of the Lord's second coming to this earth. I wonder, it is but a thought, if Job was aware by oral transmission of Enoch's prophecy (Jude 14), "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints." Certainly what the Lord reveals to one saint at one time is not inconsistent with what He reveals to another at another time.

19.26. In verse 20 Job had said "my bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh." In this verse he is enabled to declare that in his flesh he would see God even after the mouldering in the grave had had its full effect. The devouring of his flesh by worms, the very decaying of the body, did not stand in the way of what Job now believed or of what God would do. Here is another great stage revealed in the mercy of God who had ordered it for Adam and his descendants that "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3.19).

In the long, long distance of the latter day he would see God, as he now desired to see him about his justification. Surely this certainty carried with it the certainty of a present justification. If his flesh, devoured by worms, should stand before God, surely he understood a reconstitution of his human frame. To stand before God it must surely be a perfect reconstitution.

19.27. This appearance before God would not be by proxy. Psalm 49 contains a graphic picture of the workings of proxy. Read Psalm 49. 8-20 at this point, and note especially verse 11. "Their inward thought is that their houses shall endure for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names." Much good it will do them to have their names honoured by street naming or portraits or histories long after they are gone. Who cares? What personal benefit will the long departed figurehead gain? None whatever. "This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings" (Psalm 49.13). The psalmist himself knew the truth which Job here announces (Psalm 49.15) but knew also that the unbeliever would not enter into such a glorious resurrection (Psalm 49.14). However, what Job sees is different. He will really be bodily alive. He will be just the same person, only renewed in body.

"Reins" are kidneys, as in the "renal" department at hospital. They represent the innermost and hidden functions of the body. The failure of the kidneys, while not necessarily fatal, is a great undermining of the bodily systems. But here it stands for all the bodily functions, the total failure of which, of course, means death. So that by "reins" we may also include not only bodily function but the whole thought life, the whole soul life. If life ceases in the body these things also cease in the body.

Now it is the teaching of the Bible that the death of humankind is the separation of the soul from the body. Put another way that the body is the home (tabernacle) of the soul. Though nothing is said about it here the resurrection of the body presupposes the purpose (its very reason for such a glorious change) that it should once again be the abode of the soul. So that the continuing life of the soul, while not expressed here, is indeed presupposed. There is nothing here that is not of a piece with the full-blown Christian doctrine of the return of Christ to reunite the souls of believers with their bodies. Though not explicitly expressed, the use of the word "reins" in its extended use of thoughts and desires holds the seed of this larger concept.

9.28. “The root of the matter” is another expression that takes its place in familiar usage in the English language, though it is but an ancient phrase granted by the Bible, and the 1611 translators, a new lease of life. “There is hope of a tree,” you recall Job declaring in 14.7-9, “if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.” This root he now knows to be in himself concerning resurrection and desires that the comforters would recognize it too in him, and for themselves.

This root presupposes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that “root” here means the gospel and the entirety of its teachings including resurrection. It is but a root; it is not yet revealed in Job. Progressive revelation had not at this time revealed many things which were later to be explicitly taught, though no Old Testament believer, even in the days before Job, would fall short of the entirety of the fully revealed gospel. It would be as a root within them.

If the comforters are not to be found doing the devil’s work they should recognize that Job has no secret sin such as they allege but is in truth the possessor of the true gospel.

9.29. The comforters themselves should be very afraid of falling foul of God’s judgment. The boot is on the other foot from their own surmising. It would be good for them to refrain from further intimidation and snide innuendos, especially since by the Spirit of the Lord Job has been led into this wonderful truth of resurrection, and therefore justification, and is now reassured. Surely they can recognize the Lord’s hand.