

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 21

21.1-3. At first, it will seem that Job in putting the opposite point of view polarises the whole argument to an extreme, but before the chapter ends he also reiterates the comforters' view inasmuch as there is common ground. He makes it clear that he is aware that what they say are insinuations against himself in verse 27, "Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me." Broadly his argument is this, that, there are examples of good men suffering unwarrantably and evil men to whom the best things in life are awarded.

"Let this be your consolations." The only comforts which they could offer him now would be to receive his words with open mind and heart. If they had a conscience after that to continue in opposition, then, so be it, let them continue in their mocking vein. Which they did, as chapter 22 shows.

21.4. Job lays it on the line that he is not complaining to them about his condition or about God's dealings with him. Simply, he desires to have an audience with the Almighty to understand with the mind, which the Lord has given him, why these things are appointed. He may have a fallen mind; he may lack a certain degree of faith; but he trusts the Lord implicitly and desires the strengthening of his faith in the midst of the years. If men like the comforters were the object of his "complaint," that is his endeavours to understand and seek justification, what hope could he have?

21.5. Bildad (18.2) had insisted that Job should stop (mark) his flow of words and listen to him. Job now in his turn urges them to stop and really pay attention to his reply.

21.6. The issue he raises is, in essence, the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the saints. Once again it would be good to have Psalm 73 freshly in our minds. To the saints "waters of a full cup are wrung out to them" (Psalm 73.10). But why? It is a solemn consideration, especially when he is feeling so ill, to attempt to understand such things and it challenges faith. No wonder he is nervous and trembles.

21.7-15. Verse 7 asks the question, "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" This, the comforters are denying by their theology. Their theology does not match life. Surely they are overlooking some instances which they know to be true. So Job spells out the issue as far as verse 15.

21.8. At first he seems to draw an exaggerated position, as if it never, never went wrong with them. This is, maybe, how he feels. It may be simply a device of making the issue clear. Certainly, the psalmist feels it too, many years later. Presumably he would have been aware of the book of Job, but he might not have been. In Psalm 73 verses 4-5 he also says that they are not in trouble like other men. The Lord revealed to him in the sanctuary that though it may seem so, when their end is understood (Psalm 73.17-20) their longstanding advantages could not, in truth, have been welcomed. Oh! to understand that in the midst of the years, and not be envious in the meanwhile.

The rod of God is not upon them now (verse 9) so that their evil might be maximised for judgment. The rod of God is not upon their lives because they are illegitimate children (Hebrews 12.5-11) whereas he dealeth with the saved as with sons.

“Their bull gendereth...their cow calveth.” This is a concise picture to express that it would seem that everything goes right for them. Of course, it doesn’t; but, equally, they can pay their way out of setbacks in a manner in which the poor, whose very subsistence is threatened by reverses, cannot.

Much of the problem of the writer of Psalm 73 might have been spared if he had not to “reinvent the wheel,” for himself so to speak and suffer all the details which in his manner Job had already been through to guide him. Job puts it so succinctly in verse 13, “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave” which is the same conclusion which Psalm 73 reaches in verse 19. It would save us much trouble if we could learn more readily from the past. But then, again, there are some things we have to learn for ourselves by personal experience and thereby enjoy fellowship with the Saviour who “resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12.4).

“Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” The enjoyment of the things of this world may so consume us that in our blindness we will not countenance eternal, invisible things because the immediate and visible have so engulfed us.

Involved in this world so deeply, the haughty spirit moves from the mere enjoyment of pleasures to an arrogant dismissal of God’s person. “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?” They should have considered that He made them and gave them every good and perfect gift. That they have a responsibility for the right use of those gifts. That they should show appreciation for creation, especially their own existence, and for the providence which makes the things they own to be available to them. But they say, “My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deuteronomy 8.17). In like manner they say, “our lips are our own: who is lord over us?” (Psalm 12.4).

21.16. At this point Job reverts to the oft-repeated theme of the comforters, the demise of the wicked. However, Job does not shroud his words in insinuations against the comforters, implying that they, in their turn, are wicked. It is a straightforward declaration of the state of the unsaved sinner, who through inordinate love of the things of this world, is not even a God-fearer, but has put away all thoughts of God from his mind. Whereas the comforters have a simple belief that evil happens only to the ungodly, Job agrees that indeed some ungodly

persons suffer evil throughout life, but there are some who seem to suffer not at all. However, they will all descend into the grave and into hell, if unrepentant.

“It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10.23). “Thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8.18). The good things which the wicked enjoy is not within their capability or remit to obtain or keep. It is well with a believer to have no part with their plans, individual, national, international, political. “Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Psalm 1.1).

21.17. “God distributeth sorrows in his anger” to the wicked, and frequently at that. While he was putting his case Job spoke as if it were all plain sailing with the wicked (21.9-12), and it was so also in Psalm 73.4-5.

21.18. There are echoes of this passage in Psalm 1. “The ungodly...are like the chaff which the wind driveth away” (Psalm 1.4). Believers are the true seed; the wicked are the throwaways, the stubble, the chaff. The storms of life and the final great storm of death will blow them away.

21.19. His children take after him. If there is an exception, as sometimes there is – a Hezekiah grows up in the family of Ahaz, a Josiah in the family of Amon (2 Chronicles 28.1,27; 29.1-2) (2 Chronicles.33 21-25; 34.1-2) – it is by the grace of God. Otherwise the reward of the Lord is prepared for the offspring also of the wicked. Zophar said as much (20.10). Now Job asserts the same truth – it is common theology to them both. The God-fearer and the saved evangelical, both being monotheists, may have this in common. Ham knew what was in store for Canaan (Genesis 9.25).

21.20. There are times when God visits for sin in a wicked man’s own lifetime. He does not misunderstand why these things have happened to him. Though some events in life may be perplexing, the wicked man knows very well why these things have befallen him. Bearing in mind the proneness to drunkenness among the wicked, this picture of drinking the wrath of God is very apt. They are made to drink “the wine of astonishment” (Psalm 60.3) whereas a believer affirms, “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD” (Psalm 116.12-13).

21.21. While a wicked man may know that the Lord has destined terrible things for his descendants, he doesn’t live to see it. Likewise a believer may feel it too. As Job earlier said, “His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not” (14.21). The child who has an inordinate desire of sweets, is likely to be the very one who has to give them up entirely to avert obesity. The man who values his profits more than is good for him is the very one who is likely to be deprived of them (Luke 12.16-21).

21.22-26. “Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught hi knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?” (Isaiah 40.13-14). “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods...I have said ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men” (Psalm 82.1,6-7).

When God judgeth “the high,” the “high and mighty” as we say, some are contented and prosperous. Others are consumed with bitterness for one thing or another; their health isn’t what they would have liked, or their children are disobedient and so on. So it is. In God’s appointed time He will bring their lives to a close.

What is true for the high and lofty ones of the earth, is true for all sorts and conditions of men, namely that we die. Job has already spoken of worms and the decay which ensues. There is scarcely dignity in death. Yet Job with his expressed hope in resurrection (19.26) is not afraid to express the full indignity of death, the full end of dust to dust, knowing that in his flesh he shall see God.

21.27-28. Job now refers to the comforters’ insinuations. He asserts that they are without cause. As they have described the wickedness of the wicked man they have thought to themselves, and scarcely hidden it, that Job’s household has been obliterated so he must be wicked, ruler though he was. The dwelling places of the wicked are destroyed. Job’s livelihood has been destroyed. Therefore Job is wicked, even if it doesn’t show.

21.29-31. “The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isaiah 35.8). If the Lord opens the eyes, even the most uneducated shall not fail to understand the way of holiness in the Lord Jesus Christ. Passers by may have opinions on every subject under the sun but, if unredeemed, their counsel is of no value in spiritual things. Yet even casual observers will be able to see that the way things are going with some, it is clear they are on the path to destruction. They are not going to become involved, for they are not gospel preachers, to “declare his way to his face” and certainly not to take vengeance upon him. He is too powerful a figure. But the ways of death are clear and though men are powerless to help such a man, and would not be thanked for attempting to do so, God is supremely able and “will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2.6). It would be good at this point to read Romans 2.

21.32-33 “Yet shall he be brought to the grave.” The original Hebrew is plural – “graves.” As if the thrust of the meaning is not so much that he shall be brought to his own death but that he will be aware of joining all the others who have died. As in Isaiah 14.9-11. It is cold comfort to be aware that everybody is in the same trouble, whatever the predicament is. And if that predicament is death, “the clods of the valley,” the very earth which covers him, can only be said to be sweet for so long as the final judgment of the conjoined body and soul has not begun. For the soul is already, being immortal, in torment (Luke 16. 22-26).

21.34. The comfort of Job’s friends is based on a foundation of sand. Read Matthew 7.24-29. The words of the Saviour carry authority – the words of the comforters did not. Falsehood lay at the basis of their argument. Without true evangelical faith in the precious blood of Christ all religion is built on a foundation of sand; at its heart there “remaineth falsehood” and the believer is hounded without a cause. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14.6). He also says to the God-fearer, “ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14.1).