

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 29

29.1-2. This chapter also contains much picture language and may aptly likewise be called a parable. It is a description of better days, when Job was younger. It is true that we often do not value good things until we have lost them, nor use them to best advantage. The art is to seek God's blessing for each day "redeeming the time" (Ephesians 5.16). There is every indication that this is what Job had done in a public as well as a private capacity. It is one thing to serve the Lord faithfully in times of health and plenty. Though he did not know it, Job was serving the Lord even more effectively, and still speaks to us, through his adversity. When society turns away from Protestant values, those who remember or read about better days may well mourn their passing. Not that God was not still preserving Job. Preservation is even more remarkable that he should suffer so much and still live!

29.3. It would not be unfair to call this utterance a prayer for the recovery of the good days. These are not nameless longings, for he spells them out; but sometimes our desires in the midst of the years are too vast to quantify. If it is a prayer, it is certainly answered. David in later days wrote by the Spirit for the encouragement of the Lord's people, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27.1) If that light is withdrawn how we miss the strength and the assurance of the salvation which we may well truly possess! When the LORD turned away His face from His dear only-begotten Son on Calvary, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour's ongoing work on Calvary was not jeopardised, but rather one stage nearer accomplishment. His work would soon be finished and the Father's resurrection smile known fully once again.

29.4-7. When the invisible Father witnesses to our deepest spirit it is a secret act. The springs which keep us going are not apparent to the world. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psalm 25.14). The "earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (2 Corinthians 1.22; Romans 8.16). Even when these happenings seem adverse, it is still true that "deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts," (Psalm 42.6) the echoing and clashing movement of the Spirit upon the deepest place of our hearts stirs even our ungovernable unredeemed feelings causing, perhaps, a temporary chaos in our lives, as with Job.

There had been a secret impulse which drew Job's heart upwards to God. We look back to the golden days when our children were small, forgetful, perhaps, that it wasn't all straightforward and easygoing even then. But, yes, it was a good time. As his children had predeceased him, which is always very difficult, there is a poignancy about verse 5.

By cool Siloam's shady rill
How sweet the lily grows!
How sweet the breath, beneath the hill,
Of Sharon's dewy rose!

And such the child whose early feet
The paths of peace have trod;
Whose secret heart with influence sweet
Is upward drawn to God.

By cool Siloam's shady rill
The lily must decay;
The rose that blooms beneath the hill
Must shortly fade away.

And soon, too soon! the wintry hour
Of man's maturer age
May shake the soul with sorrow's power
And stormy passion's rage!
O Thou, whose infancy was found
With heavenly rays to shine,
Whose years, with changeless virtue crowned,
Were all alike divine,

Dependent on Thy bounteous breath
We seek Thy grace alone
In childhood, manhood, age and death
To keep us still Thine own.

“When I washed my steps with butter.” Purists would call this a mixed metaphor but it simply gives not two but three ideas - compound interest we may say - for us to mull over. “Butter” stands for plenty. It also requires “manufacture.” There was much to do and enjoy in the plentiful work. We do not use butter to wash steps. The meaning is that wherever Job stepped there abundance appeared. The modern image would be of whatever we put our hands to turned to gold. Plenty. Enjoyable and profitable industry. This abundance and wellbeing applied to every walk of his life, even the “rocky” hard and difficult places yielded abundance, whether the estate management, his private benevolence; his authority as king and lawgiver; for we may well think of him as the king of Edom at this time (Genesis 36.31-34 – if Job is the Jobab of this passage as the Septuagint suggests).

“The rock poured me out rivers of oil.” It had been ordained that “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3.19) but where that sweat was applied, abundance materialised from the most difficult soils, the most testing circumstances.

The gate is the place where justice was dispensed and speaks of his responsibilities, even as a young man, to uphold the law. If he be the Jobab of Genesis 36.34 he held this office of king over Edom until he died. Though he was not in a position to exercise that responsibility at the present it would appear to have been restored to him when all else was made good. (It is

worth noticing from Genesis 36 that this was not hereditary but appears to be appointed by election.)

29.8-10. Though young, princes and nobles deferred to him. Circumstantial evidence does indeed point to Job reigning in Edom, from his home town of Bozrah. Why would young men hide themselves, especially if they were of much the same age? It would be because Job, having grown up with them, was more than aware of their sinful tendencies, if not actual sins. Though Job was a young man, the aged men stood up, being respectful at the very least of his office and probably in admiration that such a young man could rule so well. They willingly offered their allegiance. The other “dukes” who might have come from all over, the dukes of all Edom, may be the princes he refers to here. And the nobles may have been their sons, perhaps, or relatives by blood the descendants of Esau himself. There was no opposition or objection from any of these parties to his lawgiving or his rulings in matters of justice and the common interest of all the cities. As David later declared (2 Samuel 23.3-4), “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.” There is great promise of future prosperity in such circumstances. Job could be well concerned to enquire where it had all gone and why.

29.11-17. Many were blessed by his fair justice. It was certainly with the consent of nobles, princes and the aged that the favourable judgments were dispensed to the less fortunate. How varied are the ordinary people who benefit from natural justice! The poor, the fatherless, the widow, the perishing (whose financial situation was dire, probably), the blind and the lame.

Where there was none to help or there were those ready to perish, the backing of practical help and natural justice came from the highest authority, namely Job himself. More important to Job than clothing was that righteousness should abound. More important than wearing the judge’s robes or the kingly crown was correct, wise decision making in both capacities and at the highest level. Where facts and details were hard to come by, no decision was made until everything had been brought to light. If there were factions of entrenched crime, or individuals of intrinsic evil their power was broken in the proper administration of law and order.

29.18. While understandable, it is always a mistake to say, “I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand.” We have begun to leave our first love when the Saviour is not our wisdom and our dependence is upon our own capacities and not on the God who gave them. It was wrong of David, many years later, when recounting his experience, he said (Psalm 30.6) “In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.” As he recounts in the next verse he had to learn “by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled”. It is the mark of the wicked one who is proud, to say in his heart, “I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity” (Psalm 10.6).

29.19-20. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9.23-24). It is a characteristic of the young to enjoy the feelings of youth. “For all

that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2.16). At some point we have all known and felt these things and need the constant cautioning of the scriptures. It is only by keeping close to our lowly Saviour that we may avoid these pitfalls.

Even when we are fully blessed and, “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season” (Psalm 2.3); even when our speech distils as the dew in the name of the Lord (Deuteronomy 32.2); even when “the dew of our youth” is still upon us (Psalm 110.3).

Nest, sand, root, waters, dew, branch. Truly this is picture language. It is called a parable (29.1). The scriptures are refreshingly clear. The Lord spoke by parables, though parables may bring obscurity to the blind in heart (Matthew 13.13-16). “I that am the LORD thy God...have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets” (Hosea 12.9-10). By preachers too, from Job to Solomon to the present day. “Because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads...given from one shepherd” (Ecclesiastes 12.9-11).

When all is fresh in youth, when all is renewed in a spiritual awakening of an individual or churches or society, let us draw the more closely, tightly bound by the Saviour’s cords of love (Hosea 11.4) to our Redeemer. Let us not be mesmerised by success or the ease with which all things work together for good.

20.21-25. Job’s words were final, not because he was a tyrant but because through their wisdom there was nothing more to be said. It was no less than they expected and they gathered eagerly to appreciate his pearls of wisdom. If he took notice of any one particular person, singling him out even for lighthearted conversation, it made their day if not their life. As those that have memories, should the Queen speak to them in a crowd of waiting admirers, they will speak of them all their lives long, so were those to whom Job deigned to speak.

The whole ethos of Edomite society was determined by the force of his character and it was a way of conquest (a king often went out with his armies – we do not know if Job actually did so) and of comfort.

That’s how things were. But not as they are now. And how Job longs for those days. And they shall be restored to him. “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance” (Psalm 42.5).