

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 31

31.1. 1-4. “Doth not he see my ways and count all my steps?” Job now reviews his life’s principles before men (the comforters) but more importantly before God. We must remember that good works are not a means of salvation; but when we are saved we do them to please Him. In the light of the whole thrust of this book we must evaluate the list of good works here not as a plea that the Lord should save him, but as a plea that the Lord whom he desired to please as a saved man would publicly declare the justification which he already possessed.

The Lord Jesus Christ said, “I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5.28). Job declares in memorable language “I made a covenant with mine eyes” that he, many, many years before the incarnate Saviour’s earthly ministry should enter into the spirit of His teaching inwardly. Furthermore, this is an indirect affirmation of one woman for one man and lifelong faithfulness to his wife.

Job declares his satisfaction with what the Lord had appointed him (there is that word “appointed” again). Why should he court destruction from on high, for there is a reward for every wickedness. It is a strange punishment. A punishment fitting for those who are estranged from God. “Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (Luke 19.27). “The LORD shall rise up...that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act” (Isaiah 28.21). “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33.11).

31.5-6. Job from this verse onward spells out many other ways in which as a saved person he has sought to demonstrate his love to the Lord. It is a compendium of the ways in which a believer will seek to please the Saviour. They cannot earn salvation if they have not received it through faith in the blood of Christ’s atonement. “Vanity” often means idols, but they are mentioned later. The word means “emptiness,” things which are pointless, perhaps unreal, imaginary or fantasy. The ultimate sense is that these things have no bearing on the serious issues of life, of eternal life, but will rather divert the mind away from these things. There are many religions which deceive. At root, deceit is the establishing of a lie as if it were truth, whether we be mistaken to believe so or do it deliberately.

Job is emphatically not saying here that he hopes his good deeds will be weighed against his evil deeds and that he will be saved because the balance just tips in favour of his good deeds.

What he is saying, before God, is that if God, who is absolutely just, were to weigh him He would see that things are indeed as he says.

31.7-8. He has not turned aside to any covetousness, adultery, or stealing; neither has he any stain on his character through the governing of his life or in any matter to which he has set his hands to do. Verse 8 is a tremendous affirmation in faith, for it would appear, as things stand, that his offspring have been rooted out and that others were taking advantage of his estate. Chapter 42 will show the Lord's approval.

31. 9-12. He has not been as the young man of Proverbs 7.7-8. As with Joseph, so with Job, Joseph was unmarried but he could still say, "neither hath he (Potiphar) kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife" (Genesis 39.9). Job, however, was married and regarded it as a heinous crime, punishable at law, which would bring his own wife into utter disgrace, to turn to another. Ultimately his family and their future would all be destroyed.

"Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent" (Proverbs 6.27-29).

31.13-15. Servants and masters are made alike in the image of God and the same natural justice applies to each. Job maintains that in all his doings with them he has dealt justly with them all. "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice" (Psalm 68.1-3).

In the light of this what would Job do if he had not been just?

31.16-23. A number of further things are listed before the consequence (verses 22,23) are revealed. Job has sustained the poor and dried the tears of the widow. He remembers the fatherless being brought up with him and has continued that tradition. He was an elder brother, a father figure even, to the fatherless in his own home. The widow nursed him and found consolation in a child, and when Job grew up this same young man provided for her. From the earliest days he has practised all these things and more. He has provided warm clothing. When opportunity occurred at the gate of justice he supported the fatherless.

He is so certain that these things are so that he declares it would be just of God to break his bones and sever his arm, the arm which should have provided these things. If there is one thing the lover of the Lord Jesus Christ would fear, it is to be destroyed from His presence. The Father turned away from the Son for a few hours while our iniquities were borne on Calvary, so that we might never be separated from Him. We could not endure the thought. God is the final authority in all matters. That His final verdict upon our lives should be "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25.41) is more than heart could bear. No, Christ's verdict will be, "Come," (not Depart), "ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25.34).

31.24-28. The two forms of idolatry are linked together here. “Covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3.5). It is difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Luke 18.18-30), but Job by the power of God did so. “The things which are impossible with man are possible with God” (Luke 18.27). The worship of the sun or moon or any created object is an insult to the Creator of all things and expressly forbidden by the first and second commandments. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exodus 20.3-5). To do these things is indeed a denial of God that is above all.

31.29-31. However much people have wished us evil or harmed us, we are not to rejoice at their downfall, however just. David well expresses this truth, “As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting” (Psalm 35.13). Even when wicked men in his own household began to covet his goods or want more and more advantages, of whatever sort, even then Job forbore to think evil of them. Maybe they didn’t actually say these things, but their looks declared them and Job recognized the signs.

31.32. Job also declares that the traveller found a ready welcome and the best hospitality.

31.33. Adam sought to hide, and covered his nakedness with a fig-leaf (Genesis 3.7-10). Job, though inheriting Adam’s fallen nature, but saved by grace through faith, did not follow his example but was open and above board in everything.

31.34-35. Neither opposition united against him in great numbers (this must have happened or Job would scarcely have mentioned it) nor being held in contempt by opposing factions, especially those bound by ties of their family loyalties which traditionally are very emotive, prevented Job from doing what was right, neither was he afraid to speak out to resist the evil. Will not the Lord come out to him, one man alone as he is, review the evidence (even if not written and witnessed) and support him?

31.36-37. When David declares “neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me” (Psalm 131.1) we are bound to think of him as King David. If matters of state were not too high for him, the only thing out of his sphere were the things that belong to God. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever” (Deuteronomy 29.29). Everything else came within David’s remit. Now if Job is a king over Edom ruling from Bozrah (Genesis 36.33) he believes that God will not count it beyond his remit to appear as a prince. “As a prince would I go near unto him” (31.37).

The answer of God (31.35) would be written, if not with paper and ink, upon the fleshy tables of his heart. The responsibility of living by such an answer and proclaiming it throughout his kingdom he would carry on his shoulder. It would be the crowning glory of his life to walk in the land of the living as a justified man, a king unto God (Revelation 5.10). “I would declare unto him the number of my steps.” He would report to him, perhaps daily, but certainly regularly, giving account down to the smallest detail. These are his ideals. Surely the Spirit of the Lord has created such a desire in his heart because the Lord will fulfil them. Surely each believer may live by such ideals before the Lord in the land of the living.

31.38-40. The film of the struggle to emancipate South Africa from apartheid was called, "Cry the beloved country." The concept is that the ills of the people of a land are a crime against the very land itself. So early is this concept that it takes its origin from God Himself, for He said to Cain about Abel whom he had murdered, "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Genesis 4.10). The cry of the land is to God. If Job had abused his people and his land it would cry to God against him. It is a mute cry. It is a vivid way of saying that the Lord misses nothing of that which is done upon earth. It was curse enough that the Lord should say to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee..." (Genesis 3.17). Job's labours had been under that curse. His imprecation was that rampant weeds should additionally thwart the labour of his hands to blight the future of his estate. And with this he signs off.