

Notes on Job 16—37

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Chapters 16 and 17

16:1–3 Job had said it was useless to take windy words seriously (6:26), but his friends complained of them (8:2, 15:2). Now, Job had become tired of the windy words of his comforters. What they had not discerned in Job's 'wind' was a true testimony that God himself would later commend. He could see that their adherence to the forms of true religion made their conversation windy.

16:4–22 Job felt attacked by God and was now surrounded by those who delighted in his downfall. Though God's arrows had pierced him, his blood was crying for vengeance, and now, he believed there would be a witness in heaven (cf. 9:33) to speak for him and gain justice. Whether this be God himself, or another (in opposition to Satan? Cf. Zechariah 3: 1–5), he knew that his pain was not the last word of God about him.

17:1–5 Job said his friends or others who scoffed would be judged—they had no understanding, and so, no message for those in distress. With no human help, he looked to God to be guarantor for him (17:3).

17:6–16 Those who were upright had been appalled at Job's plight and resisted the wrong accusation against him (17:8–10). Eliphaz had said (15:22–23) the wicked despair of seeing light again, but Job would not embrace this end in death. The wisdom around him was, in fact, not wisdom. His God would acknowledge him.

Chapter 18

That Job should bear witness to something outside of Bildad's frame of reference was intolerable. He felt treated as an animal and said Job expected the world to revolve around him. Bildad added nothing new; he was fixed on the idea that catastrophe was proof of guilt, and, that by his protests, Job had proved himself to be evil and godless.

Chapter 19

Job said his friends had wronged him by their accusations. They had no evidence of his sins other than God's 'fault finding' (vv. 4–6). God was his enemy (vv. 8–12) and God had set his family and community against him as well (vv. 13–22). But he refused to let go the hope of vindication from God—in this world and in his present flesh. He did not identify what he meant by a Redeemer standing on the earth but made it clear that the only place vindication would be effective was on this present

earth. His tormentors would suffer wrath for their wrongful accusations. They had joined Satan in his failure to understand love.

Chapter 20

Zophar was not made wiser by Job's amazing appeal to God for vindication. Rather, he felt accused and insulted by him, and offended by his presumptuous lifting himself up to heaven. Well may the world scoff at the claim of a Christian that they have a divine Advocate and a future beyond present privations. Zophar saw Job through the narrow view of God as rewarder of the righteous and assumed that Job must be a wicked man. His account of God dealing harshly with the wicked may have been designed to strike fear into Job's mind, or perhaps they were merely the protests of a person wanting to maintain a simplistic theology.

Chapter 21

Whatever, Job was unimpressed. He wanted to be heard in what may well have been new insights that were coming to him in his distress. He pointed to the frequently observed fact of unrighteous and godless people who prospered. They wanted God to keep out of their affairs, and judgement never caught up with them. This was common knowledge but ignored by Job's comforters. So they had nothing to offer Job.

Chapter 22

The responses of Job's friends to him had become increasingly hostile. Zophar did not think he should be silenced by Job (11:3); Eliphaz said Job abolished the fear of God by his speech (15:4); Bildad said Job was treating them as stupid (18:3); Zophar said he heard a rebuke that dishonoured him (20:3). Job and his friends were not dealing in ideas but each seeking to maintain their integrity or righteousness in their own eyes. The friends still had health and welfare on their side. Job had to rely on God alone.

Now Eliphaz accused Job outright of being a wicked man. Job had not accused them of wrong but argued for his own righteousness before God. His dealings were with God and became more strongly so as the arguments proceeded. His friends' arguments became more accusatory—perhaps because they felt the basis of their own righteousness was being eroded by what Job had said.

More importantly, Eliphaz betrayed his theology—human righteousness was of no value to God. That was the point of the original heavenly dialogue—God was pleased with Job's righteousness. Eliphaz was not relating to God in his piety but doing himself good. He had shown that he was what Satan accused Job of being—good because it paid him to be good. Hebrew wisdom, which showed that good conduct would lead to good outcomes, could appeal to the desire to be in control of one's destiny. A person could be merely expedient while all the while appearing to be godly. In this connection we should note that Jesus went to the cross that the world might know that he loved the Father—not simply because it seemed the best of available plans to restore humanity.

Eliphaz still had a certain respect for Job and warmly exhorted him to make peace with God, forecasting rich days ahead if he did so—but his word was based on an empty evaluation. He had not begun to understand the dilemma Job faced.

Chapters 23 and 24

Job was sure he could be justified before God. He just could not find God. For all that, he still knew God knew him, was testing him, and refining him like gold. In God's freedom to do as he pleased, Job feared that worse was to come, but even this and the darkness of it could not silence his protests to God. (Cf. Luke 18:8.)

From where he sat, it seemed to Job that there was no day of reckoning—for him, or for many that were oppressed by great evil.

Yet he still confessed his faith that there would be a final day of judgement. (Or, he made a concession to the rightness of his friend's arguments, or, this part of the text is misplaced.)

Habel asks if 24:18–25 is a misplaced continuation of Zophar's speech. It has similar ideas to his and represents more the ideas of Job's friends than of Job. He says there would be no need for Elihu to speak as he did if this speech is from Job.

Chapter 25

Bildad had no hope of anyone living as a justified person. His cynicism seems to have been complete. But what hope is there for humanity if there is no one to declare us justified, and, at the end of the road, no waiting Father?

Chapters 26

Job understood the purpose of friendship to include building another up to the confidence to call on God—not to take that away. Job's problem had been to stand naked (as though dead) before the awesome God who—even in his distant works made the earth and made it tremble.

Chapter 27

The accuser of souls had stirred up God to deny justice to Job, but Job would not admit the accusations now being spoken through the mouths of his friends. He prayed that his enemies would never find God—an appropriate prayer if what his enemies proclaimed was a righteousness originating with themselves rather than with God. Cf. Galatians 1:6–9.

Job could speak of the judgement of God on evildoers as well as any (v. 11)—especially as he had been exposed to the power of God in his suffering. Some think this section (vv. 7–23) was spoken by one of Job's friends. But it may also be taken as Job returning to what he and his friends had always believed together—things he still affirmed, but which he would have to wait for, and which may apply more to his friends ('like the wicked' in v. 7, who had now 'become altogether vain' in v. 12) than to himself.

Chapter 28

Whether this chapter is by Job or by the author of the whole book, it provides a summary of the position to which the book has now come. The reader should agree—as Job’s friends should have now agreed—that wisdom is not found by probing the earth’s secrets. It cannot be compared with its rich resources or be purchased with gold. It is hidden from us. But God has wisdom, he gave it its place, and he has decreed that we will find it as we fear him and shun evil.

Chapters 29 to 31

29: 1–25 Job longed for the simplicity his life had had. He had feared God, turned from evil and had the blessing of God resting on him. Then, wisdom seemed so simple. The great of the land had hung on his words and thought themselves blessed with his smile.

30:1–14 Now he endured the scorn of the land’s lowliest and most despised inhabitants. Because God did not uphold him any more, the population took their opportunity to add insult to injury and to pursue him with malice—exposing their own paucity of righteousness. By contrast, Job had lifted up the downcast (29:12–17).

30:15–31 Job said God wrestled with him—to bring him to a tortured death. Job told God he would not treat another person like that himself. He was without help from God or man.

31:1–12 Job knew the power of sexual sins and had covenanted with himself that he would not err. God could have no blame to bring against him in this regard.

31:13–40 Job searched for reasons for his distress. His conscience would provide him with no answer. He had been good to his employees, and to others who had sought his aid. He had feared to do otherwise. He had not relied on his wealth or worshipped the creation or profited by his neighbour’s downfall. If a clear accusation came he would welcome it—it would be contact with God which at present was denied to him. Nothing in the land could bring accusation against him.

Chapters 32 to 37

32:1–7 Elihu had listened to Job’s friends with dismay. What he regarded as Job’s insolence had not been answered.

32:8–12 He claimed a right to speak because wisdom was not just for the aged. God had made everyone with the understanding of what was right. His speech showed that his sense of right and wrong was not the result of revelation but limited to diligent enquiry and practice.

32:13–22 He claimed that wisdom should be established on earth and not left for God to declare.

33:1–22 To Job, Elihu said: we are both human and can dialogue as equals. God speaks in many ways, and has spoken to you to warn you.

33:23–33 Elihu allowed that an angel may mediate for someone—as Job had intimated (9:32–35; 16:18–20; 19:21–27). What such a ransom may be is not identified, but Elihu was limited to Job’s present life and perhaps his future repentance.

34:1–9 To Job’s friends, Elihu said ‘Job must be evil because he says I gain nothing from being righteous’. Clearly, Elihu had not sat in the heavenly council or he would have known that that was precisely the matter in question. Job was righteous for love of God. Of that, God was sure, and proud.

34:10–37 Elihu could allow for nothing other than God as absolute Judge. Therefore, Job should repent. He could not expect God to bend to his terms. Elihu longed for him to come to judgement!

35:1–16 Against Job’s vigorous belief that he could be acquitted by God, Elihu believed that God was not affected by human evil or righteousness. Nor would God bother with human cries for justice because such cries would only be hypocritical. So, to Job, he said: ‘God doesn’t listen to you.’

36:1–33 ‘I have God’s wisdom’ said Elihu: ‘God gives everyone their rights. If he judges them it is to correct them. If they do not repent, it is to destroy them. You are being wooed away from judgement. God is great and could do no wrong.’ But Elihu’s knowledge of God had not gone through the crucible of suffering—or of moral reality.

37:1–13 Elihu rose to his theme. There was no doubt that he was in awe of God. God himself would say such things to Job ere long. But Elihu’s ‘God’ was determined only by observation.

37:14–24 In applying his knowledge to Job however, he did not appreciate that humanity must ask God for vindication, should want to speak to God, and should be dismayed if obliged to live without evident tokens of the blessing of God. Elihu’s God was ‘beyond our reach and exalted in power’. The idea that God would now reveal himself to Job would have been furthest from Elihu’s mind.