

JOB

Chapter 31

Job's Final Appeal

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? 2 What would be my portion from God above and my heritage from the Almighty on high? 3 Is not calamity for the unrighteous, and disaster for the workers of iniquity? 4 Does not he see my ways and number all my steps? 5 “If I have walked with falsehood and my foot has hastened to deceit; 6 (Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!) 7 if my step has turned aside from the way and my heart has gone after my eyes, and if any spot has stuck to my hands, 8 then let me sow, and another eat, and let what grows for me be rooted out. 9 “If my heart has been enticed toward a woman, and I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, 10 then let my wife grind for another, and let others bow down on her. 11 For that would be a heinous crime; that would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges; 12 for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon, and it would burn to the root all my increase. 13 “If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, 14 what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb? 16 “If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, 17 or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it 18 (for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow, 19 if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, or the needy without covering, 20 if his body has not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep, 21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, because I saw my help in the gate, 22 then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. 23 For I was in terror of calamity from God, and I could not have faced his majesty. 24 “If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, 25 if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, 26 if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, 27 and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, 28 this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above. 29 “If I have rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me, or exulted when evil overtook him 30 (I have not let my mouth sin by asking for his life with a curse), 31 if the men of my tent have not said, ‘Who is there that has not been filled with his meat?’ 32 (the sojourner has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler), 33 if I have concealed my transgressions as others do by hiding my iniquity in my heart, 34 because I stood in great fear of the multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me, so that I kept silence, and did not go out of doors—35 Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!) Oh, that I had the indictment written by my adversary! 36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; I would bind it on me as a crown; 37 I would give him an account of all my steps; like a prince I would approach him. 38 “If my land has cried out against me and its furrows have wept together, 39 if I have eaten its yield without payment and made its owners breathe their last, 40 let thorns grow instead of wheat, and fowl weeds instead of barley.” The words of Job are ended.

1:1–40 The climactic section of Job’s three-part summation (see note on 29:1–31:40). It is negative in the sense that Job denies all the sins listed, but it has the positive purpose of attesting

loyalty to God as his sovereign Lord. In the strongest legal terms, using a series of self-maledictory oaths, Job completes his defense. No more can be said (v. 40). He now affixes his signature to the document (v. 35), and the burden of proof that he is a wretched sinner rests with God. Job's call for vindication had reached a climax in 27:2–6. Now he amplifies that statement with the details of his godly life. Each disavowal (vv. 5–7, 9, 13, 16–21, 24–27, 29–34, 38–39) is accompanied by an oath that calls for the punishment the offense deserves (vv. 8, 10–12, 14–15, 22–23, 28, 40). The principle at work is the so-called “law of retaliation” (see Ex 21:23–25 and note [See Dt 19:21. The so-called law of retaliation, as its contexts show, was meant to limit the punishment to fit the crime. By invoking the law of love, Jesus corrected the popular misunderstanding of the law of retaliation (see Mt 5:38–42).]). (CSB)

31:1–12 Job begins with sins of the heart, especially sexual lust (vv. 1–4), cheating in business (vv. 5–8) and marital infidelity (vv. 9–12). (CSB)

31:1 *gaze at a virgin*. To do so is to sin (see Mt 5:28). (CSB)

Job promised to avoid looking upon young women so as not to give an opportunity to lust. Cf Mt 6:22–23. Hipp: “He who looks upon a woman, even though he escape the temptation, does not come away pure of all lust. And why should one have trouble, if he can be chaste and free of trouble? See what Job says: ‘I made a covenant with mine eyes, that I should not think of another’s wife.’ Thus well does he know the power of abuse. And Paul for this reason kept ‘under his body, and brought it into subjection’ [1Co 9:27]” (ANF 5:173). (TLSB)

The last word, “girl,” may also be translated “virgin” or “maiden,” and refers to one who is unmarried. On the other hand Job speaks of a married woman in verse 9. In this opening verse Job strongly maintains that he made up his mind to not yield to the temptation of lustfully looking at an attractive girl. (PBC)

31:2 *portion ... heritage*. Job applies his argument of 27:13. Ch 31 presents the “rewards” from God due him for various sins. Yet he disagrees with the accusation of Zophar in 20:29, who presumed that Job is suffering because of wickedness. (TLSB)

31:6 *let me be weighed...just balance*. Job believes that he is blameless before God on the basis of his works. He believes that if he is put into the balance of justice, he will be proved just in God's sight. Job is again arguing that God has been unrighteous by permitting suffering to strike him. (TLSB)

The OT frequently condemns the use of false scales. Job knows that God's scales are perfectly honest and he asks God to weigh him in them. (PBC)

my integrity. Does not imply sinless perfection [Spiritually and morally upright. This does not mean that Job was sinless. He later defends his moral integrity but also admits he is a sinner (see 6:24; 7:21)]. (CSB)

31:7 *my heart has gone after my eyes*. Job consciously avoided the desires of his heart, thinking that he would remain morally clean (Ec 2:10). (TLSB)

These express all aspects of his desire, attitude and activity. (PBC)

spot has stuck. A moral blemish through action is like a blotch on the hand that mars its physical perfection (cf Dn 1:4). (TLSB)

31:8 *be rooted out* – For him it would be a total loss of his investment if he were guilty of crooked dealings. (PBC)

Invoking a curse on himself. (TLSB)

31:10 *grind for another*. Grinding meal is a service of low status in another’s household. The imagery has sexual connotations, perhaps due to the bowed position of the person grinding or the association of the mill’s handle with a phallus. (TLSB)

bow down on her. Implying sexual intercourse. (TLSB)

31:11 *punished by the judges*. Community’s legal system dealt with disorder caused by sexual relations outside of marriage. Breaking the marriage vow breaks the foundational bond of society and hurts not just husband and wife but also children, neighbors, community, and finally the Creator of holy marriage. (TLSB)

31:12 *Abaddon*. The Hebrew word is “Abaddon,” the very word John uses in Revelation 9:11 when he speaks of the king of hell, Satan. The Bible elsewhere describes adultery as a sin that burns like a fire. Solomon warns us against that sin in these words: “Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.” (Proverbs 6:27). (PBC)

all my increase. Refers to products of the agricultural harvest (2Ki 8:6). Job understands that adultery is a disordering sin that can have devastating effects in the community, including economic effects. (TLSB)

31:13–23 Job reveals genuine understanding concerning matters of social justice: Human equality is based on creation (vv. 13–15), compassion toward those in need is essential (vv. 16–20), and power and influence must not be abused (vv. 21–23). (TLSB)

31:14 *God rises up?* To bring witness against the wickedness Job describes (Dt 19:16–17). (TLSB)

31:15 *fashion us in the womb?* Each person is created specially by God, and God Himself sees to a person’s protection. (TLSB)

31:16–22 Job is calling down a divine curse upon himself if he has not cared for the poor and needy. (TLSB)

31:16–17 *widow ... fatherless*. Job expresses his concern for the helpless and unfortunate. (CSB)

31:16 *poor*. Those who have fallen on hard times and are pressed to find enough to eat. Caring for the poor is a blessing to the giver (Ps 41:1). The Lord promises to rescue the poor through the Messiah’s ministry (Is 11:4). (TLSB)

widow. A woman without a husband was in a socially ambiguous position. She was a special object of charity because she was often impoverished (Ru 2:2; Dt 14:29). (TLSB)

31:17 *eaten my morsel alone*– Job was not a miser. He regularly shared his food with others. People were welcome at Job’s table. Not only on the more festive occasions when the menu included meat, but even on ordinary day when simpler fare (bread) was served, others were welcome guests. These words remind us of the household of Martin Luther, at whose table many guests were frequently gathered, fed, and entertained. Both Job and Luther extended hospitality to others. (PBC)

fatherless. The fatherless are seen in the same disadvantaged category as widows and the poor. (TLSB)

31:18 Job describes his lifelong practice of caring for the poor. In caring for many, he became a surrogate parent. (TLSB)

31:21 *my help in the gate*. Job never used his influence with the courts to cover up violence against the helpless. (TLSB)

31:23 *terror of calamity*. Job admits that his works were motivated by fear rather than love. Such works may serve our neighbor but do not truly glorify God. (TLSB)

31:24–28 Job explains what he has not done wrong. (TLSB)

31:24 *fine gold*. Perhaps polished or completely refined gold. Emphasizes monetary value of Job’s fortune. (TLSB)

The Apostle Paul warns us: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:9,10). We do not have to be rich to love money. People who are poor or of average wealth can also easily yield to that temptation. (PBC)

31:25 *my wealth was abundant*. Since Job was wealthy, he must have had to fight the temptation to place his confidence in wealth. (PBC)

31:26–27 The sun and moon are not to be objects of worship (see Dt 4:19; 17:3; Eze 8:16–17). (CSB)

In ancient times worshiping the sun, the moon and other celestial bodies was very prevalent. Because the sun is so important for life and the growth on this earth, from the earliest times people have worshiped it as a god. The Egyptians wrote many poems addressed to the sun-god. Among the Greek gods were Apollo and Helios, gods of the sun. Other nations also had their sun gods. The moon has fascinated people from earliest times because of its ever-changing phases and its control of ocean tides. The Greek regarded Artemis (Diana) and Selene as goddesses of the moon. Thinking that the stars exerted a strong influence upon human beings, the ancients developed the false science of astrology. Today there are millions of people who faithfully read their horoscopes and who use astrology as a guide for their lives. Faith in astrology is inconsistent with true faith in God and is really a form of idolatry. (PBC)

31:26 *sun ... moon*. Objects of idolatrous worship in the ancient Near East. (TLSB)

31:27 *kiss*. An ancient gesture of worship (see 1Ki 19:18; Hos 13:2). (CSB)

Figure of speech describing narcissistic self-absorption. Luth: “It is iniquity to kiss one’s own hand, Job 31:27, to establish one’s own works, to refuse obedience under the guise of something good or better, and thus iniquitously to prefer one’s own opinion to that of a superior, of Christ and of God, etc.” (AE 11:292). (TLSB)

31:29–32 The sin of gloating over one’s enemy was condemned by Moses (Ex 23:4–5) and by Christ (Mt 5:43–47). (CSB)

31:30 *curse*. Job had not pronounced a wish that those who had hurt him should have evil befall them. (TLSB)

31:32 *sojourner*. Foreigner. Providing lodging for travelers was basic hospitality. (TLSB)

31:33–34 A strong denial of hypocrisy. (CSB)

31:33 *hiding my iniquity in my bosom*. Sin hidden away and unconfessed, just as Adam tried to hide his iniquity. (TLSB)

31:35–37 Job’s final call for justice. His signature endorses every word of the oaths he has just taken. (CSB)

31:35 *one to hear me*. God is so immense that Job feels he needs someone who can help him, someone who can argue his case in court. Job’s call is not directly predicting the mediatorship of Christ, for Job is not looking for one to forgive him but for one who can testify to his innocence. (CSB)

here is my signature – More literally the Hebrew reads, “Behold – my sign.” In the original the word “sign” is “tau,” the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In an early form of its writing the letter “tau” was written like the English letter X. Then as now the X was regarded as a valid signature of an illiterate person. Although Job was not illiterate, he used that word to indicate that he meant what he said and would verify it with his own signature. (PBC)

Lit, “my tav.” Hbr letter *tav* was shaped like a plus mark or cross and could stand as a signature. Cf Ezk 9:4, 6. (TLSB)

let the Almighty answer me. The Israelite covenant name for God. (CSB)

indictment. Hbr *sepher*; a book or legal document. (TLSB)

adversary. The Hebrew for this word is not the same as that for “Satan” (see note on 1:6). Here Job’s accuser is either (1) a human adversary (perhaps one of the three friends) or (2) God himself. In any event, Job assumes that accusations have been lodged against him before the court of heaven to which God has responded with judgments. (CSB)

adversary! Lit, “man of my dispute.” In this judicial proceeding before God (Dt 25:1), Job believes that God will vindicate him against the indictment of his three friends. (TLSB)

31:36 *shoulder*. Inscriptions were sometimes worn on the shoulder as a perpetual reminder of their importance (see Ex 28:12). (CSB)

Written indictment against him (v 35) was worn as a matter of pride, so certain was Job that God would vindicate him. (TLSB)

as a crown. Job was even luxuriating in this misbegotten accusation against him, turning it into a crown (1Pt 4:14–16). (TLSB)

Job would proudly wear that declaration of innocence as a badge of honor on his shoulder and as a crown on his head. (PBC)

31:37 *like a prince.* Job approaches the Almighty confident of his status before Him. Note the difference between Job and Adam (Gn 3:8). (TLSB)

31:38–40 A climactic oath that completes an earlier theme and creates a unique emphasis. Job calls for a curse on his land if he has not been fully committed to social justice (see also vv. 13–15). (CSB)

31:39 *made its owners breathe their last* – Those words may have an even stronger meaning: “snuff out the life of its owners,” as some translations read. That is what King Ahab did when at the instigation of his wicked wife Jezebel he had Naboth falsely accused and killed and then took his vineyard. (PBC)

Job had sharecroppers on his land whom he never left destitute. (TLSB)

31:40 *let thorns grow instead of wheat* – He invokes upon himself the curse with which God cursed the ground following the sin of Adam and Eve. The Lord also called the ground to witness against Cain after he had murdered Abel. (PBC)

The words of Job are ended. His complaints and arguments are now over. He will only make brief statements of contrition (40:4–5; 42:2–6) following the divine discourses. (CSB)

Ch 31 Job bases his speech on the idea that moral behavior merits God’s favor and that immoral behavior earns God’s displeasure. If anyone could be justified before God based on good works, it would have been Job. But God’s justice is too uncompromising, and His ways on earth are hidden. Job will learn that God has His purpose in suffering. There is no way for humans to see behind the mask of God, to know God’s will apart from Scripture. He reveals His gracious will through the Word, not by reason or experience. • Set before our eyes Your good and gracious will toward us in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)