

JOB 19:25 AND JOB 23:10 REVISITED AN EXEGETICAL NOTE

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Job 19:25 and 23:10 are subjects of these notes because a misunderstanding of the court theme in Job has been the source of confusion for both of them. In the context of both passages Job confidently maintains his forensic innocence, innocence confirmed by God. The LORD inquires of the adversary, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8b).

In fact, it is precisely the juridical nature of the passages that gives rise to the confusion. In part three, the first number of Handel's *Messiah*, the air (soprano) sings several lines which link Job 19:26 with 1 Cor 15:20, a connection based on a misconception of the court metaphor:

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them that sleep.

The NASB differs only slightly in its rendering of Job 19:25: "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth."

Both translations focus on the identity of Job's "redeemer" in that verse. Many take the redeemer to be Job's salvific deliverer, Jesus Christ. In juxtaposing the Job and Corinthian passages, Handel clearly made this connection in his majestic masterpiece. But in the context of the whole book, Job is looking for the one who will declare his innocence (as in court) *before his accusers*. The Hebrew word for *redeemer* is the same as that used in a similar context that has a forensic setting:

Do not move the ancient boundary,
Or go into the fields of the fatherless;

For their *Redeemer* is strong;
He will *plead their case* against you"
(Prov 23:10-11, emphasis added).

The emphasized words in the Proverbs passage, occurring in a parallel structure, bring clarity to the redeemer's role in the Job passage. A redeemer/court defender would dispute accusations against Job's integrity. Job's accusers, based on their rigid perception of the retribution principle, extrapolate that Job must have sinned. According to their narrow perception of God's retributive activity, no one suffers for being innocent`Job must be guilty. The righteous sufferer admits to having sinned, yet he disagrees with his comforters on the issue of equating the measure of suffering *to the degree of his sin*. To push the analogy, the punishment does not fit the crime, according to Job.

Following through with the above interpretation, one concludes from the words of Job 19:26b that many use to argue for Job's resurrection hope`"yet without my flesh I shall see God" do not prove that at all. They rather mean, "From my flesh I shall see God," a statement meaning that Job will see God while still alive. Job's confident expectation is that God will "clear him of all charges" before his death. This is the same confidence he expresses in 13:18: "Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be vindicated."

This proposed interpretation does not dispute messianic "interpretations" of the Job passage. It merely explains the verse in its more immediate context.

Job 23:1-10 follows similar lines. The oft misunderstood line comes in v. 10: "But He knows the way I take; *when* He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The usual interpretation of this verse has it saying that Job will emerge victorious from his sufferings`he will get through the testing without failure. Taken in the context of this verse, however much like Job 19:25 f.`it focuses on Job's confidence in his innocence as well as God's ability to vindicate him. The term "tried" has no direct reference to trials in suffering, but is a court term for action taken for or against a defendant. One might refer to it as "due process" or court procedures.

In both passages under consideration, Job demands to "see" God (in court). In Job 29:23 ff. the righteous sufferer laments that his faithful deeds have not been written down, in which case he would

bring them in as court evidence; but he knows that his vindicator will defend him regardless. In Job 23:1-10 Job desires to speak face-to-face with God in a trial setting. At that time, God would declare his innocence, not his sinlessness.

For Job to concede that he had sinned would be to admit to deserving his suffering. For Job to deny sinning entirely would be claim a level of innocence attainable by no man. Job demands to see God, for only God can pronounce innocence on a righteous sufferer. Put slightly differently, no one suffers as absolutely innocent. The book of Job views suffering on a relative scale whose reference point is the wisdom behind God's retribution.