

The Book of Job

Session 15: Job 19:25--I know my Redeemer lives

By John Walton

This is Dr. John Walton and his teaching on the Book of Job. This is session 15, Job 19.25

Introduction: Job 19.25 [00:23-2:02]

In the midst of chapter 19, in Job's speech, responding to Bildad comes one of the most familiar verses in the Book of Job. As translated in the NIV, it says, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end, he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh, I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me." So, what's going on here? And, of course, these verses are very familiar because of Handel's Messiah and that wonderful song, "I Know My Redeemer Lives." So, how should we interpret this verse? Well, let's work through it.

First of all, it needs to be understood in relation to Job's many references that have already gone by where he refers to an advocate related to his legal case. He's looking for someone to represent him before God, someone who will take his case, take his part, and advocate for him. This is another word that suggests that. There are a number of words that Job uses to refer to this position. And, of course, this is just one of them. There are several others in the book. In fact, they all focus on the same kind of role of someone that'll take Job's part.

Advocate = Personification of Job's cry View [2:02-2:44]

Now, we have to ask the question, what sort of advocate does Job seek, and who does he expect to fill that role? Where does he expect this advocacy to come from? D. J. Cline's commentary, an excellent commentary, tries to understand the advocate impersonally as a personification of Job's cry of innocence. He thinks that that cry itself

will kind of stand, without the voice that gave it sound, and that will be his advocate when he's gone.

Advocate [*goel*] = God or Human Relative View [2:44-3:49]

A second view, and a more traditional one, a very common one, is that God is the advocate, but that's, of course, quite problematic. A mediator can't be one of the parties, especially the one accused of injustice. It wouldn't make a lot of sense for him to be the advocate against himself when he's the one being accused.

Others have suggested that the advocate role would be played by a human relative. The Hebrew word translated as "Redeemer" is *goel*, and *goel* had a particular legal function within the clans of Hebrew society. They were the ones that stood up for the rights of the family. So, the idea that this would be a human relative would make some sense of the word that's being used, but we've got a problem. All his relatives have deserted him. So, it's very difficult to think that he will hope for an advocate from those ranks.

Advocate [*goel*] = Elihu View [3:49-4:14]

When we later on, get to Elihu's speech, Elihu projects himself as the advocate. He is presented as one who has a high opinion of himself, as we'll learn, but he projects himself, but he's got a different sort of outcome in mind than Job has. Elihu does not see vindication as the end of that result. So, that's not the kind of *goel* that Job is looking for.

Advocate [*goel*] = Member of the Divine Council [4:14-6:49]

In my view, the most likely option is that Job is looking for an advocate from the membership of the divine council. He's looking for someone to stand up and take his part in the heavenly realm where decisions are being made. It's an option referred to by Elihu in Job 33, verses 23 and 24. It's also an option that was discarded early on by Eliphaz in 5:1, and in 22:2 and 3, where Eliphaz basically said, "Don't count on that.

That's not going to work out for you." And that shows that that would be a theoretical possibility.

With 22:2 and 3, I do have a retranslation of that. Again, a very difficult couple of verses, and I would translate it; again I can't defend it here; you'll find it in my commentary. "Can a wise mediator do any good for a human being serving on behalf of God? Can such a mediator bring a human any benefit? Will God respond favorably? When you justify yourself, will there be a gain when you give a full account of your ways." That's Eliphaz's case "really that's not going to get you anywhere." It's really, and you know, he's got a point here. It's counterproductive to prove God wrong. You know, it's just something in the end that's going to be unsatisfying about that whole option.

We find then that Job very deeply desires some sort of advocate or mediator to come to his aid. It's rather ironic that he doesn't know about the scene of heaven when it was precisely a member of the heavenly court that came before God that started this whole process. An advocate has already been involved, the Challenger, but he was challenging God's policies, and it got Job into this fix. Job is unlikely to procure another. Even if he did, he could not win. If by some fluke he did win, the result would be devastating because if Job is right about God and with the help of a mediator, he forces God to admit to wrong, then God ends up being unworthy of worship. If Job uses this strategy and wins, God loses.

Redeemer [*goel*] is not Jesus [6:49-8:01]

So, what do we have here in Job 19:25 to 27? Lots of people have heard the word "redeemer." And especially when they see it capitalized in some translations, they assume that the Redeemer is Jesus. Because, after all, we know Jesus as our Redeemer. Hebrew doesn't have capital letters. So, the capitalization is interpretation. And Handel's Messiah, as beautiful a musical work as it is, is not our guide to interpretation.

Does Job express the need for someone like Jesus? Is that the kind of advocate he wants? No New Testament author draws the connection between Jesus and Job in

chapter 19. So, we really need to work in the context of Job itself. No New Testament passage or author is going to give us an enlarged supplemented interpretation.

Role of a *Goel* is Vindication not Forgiveness [Advocate/Redeemer] [8:01-10:34]

A *goel*, again, that's the word translated redeemer, a *goel* is one who enters a legal situation on behalf of another. That's what a *goel* does. If a wrong is involved, the *goel* rights the wrong done to a person rather than getting involved on their behalf to right the wrong the person has committed. A *goel* is trying to right a wrong done to a person. That's, of course, Job's situation. He feels like a wrong has been done to him.

A *goel* does not work on behalf to right a wrong the person has committed. That's what Jesus did, but that's really not the role that we find. Job wants an advocate here, a *goel* and redeemer, who will demonstrate that he is innocent. He's not looking for someone to save him from the offenses he has committed. He's persuaded he has not committed anything that deserves the treatment he has gotten. He's not looking for someone to save him from offenses. If he admits to offenses, the game is lost. He wants it on record that he did nothing to deserve his suffering; that's not the redeemer role that Jesus plays. In fact, it's the opposite. Job is convinced that his *goel* is alive. "I know that my *goel* lives."

That's not something about the resurrection of Jesus. He lives for Job right now. That's what Job's convinced of. And that *goel* will take a stand. The verb is used in a literary sense for giving one's testimony. He will testify on my behalf. He expects the *goel* to arrive at his dung heap. That's the dust that it refers to here. So, he expects the advocate to come here.

Yet in My Flesh [10:34-12:27]

So, three interpretations of this idea of "after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Some think that Job expects resurrection. There's nothing anywhere in the Old Testament that leads to support that kind of expectation. Some think that Job expects post-humous vindication. That even after I'm gone, that somehow, I will

be vindicated. Others think that Job expects a last-minute reprieve. That's the direction that I tend to go in my interpretation. When he talks about that "after my skin has been destroyed," I think he's referring to the flaying off of his skin that he's doing as he scrapes himself with a potsherd scraping off his skin.

So, even after it's all gone, if I sit here, flaying myself, until it's all gone "in my flesh, I will see God." That means that I will be restored to God's favor. To see God means being restored to his favor. Though his skin is gone, that's hyperbole; he's been scraping away at it, he will see God's restoration in the flesh. Skin/flesh very nicely done-before he dies. Job has no hope of heaven. Seeing God refers to being restored to favor and that he'll no longer be a stranger, an outsider, out of favor.

Summary Paraphrase [12:27-13:08]

So, I would paraphrase it in this way. I firmly believe that there is someone, perhaps from the divine council, but unspecified, someone somewhere who will come and testify on my behalf right here on my dung heap at the end of all this. Despite my peeling skin, I expect to have enough left to come before God in my own flesh. I will be restored to his favor and no longer be treated as a stranger. This is my deepest desire; by the way, prosperity has nothing to do with it.

Job's Affirmation: Vindication, not forgiveness [13:08-14:03]

This is a significant affirmation on Job's part. We miss it entirely when we try to make the redeemer be Jesus. Jesus is our Redeemer, but he's not the kind of redeemer Job is looking for here. So, Job is not looking for someone who will take the punishment for his offenses and justify him. He's looking for vindication, not justification. He doesn't think he deserves any punishment that someone else would take on them. Vindication is emphatically not something that Jesus provides. Job is expecting someone to play a role that is the polar opposite of that which is played by Jesus.

Jesus is not Job's *Goel* [14:03-14:58]

Viewing Jesus as the *goel* in Job is a distorting factor in the interpretation of the book and runs against the grain of Job's hope and desire. Jesus is not the answer to the problems posed in the book of Job, though he is the answer to the larger problem of sin and the brokenness of the world. The death and resurrection of Jesus mediate for our sin but do not provide the answer for why there is suffering in the world or how we should think about God when life goes wrong. That's what the Book of Job does, and we have to treat the book in such a way that we can understand the message that it has in its pages.

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[14:58]