

Job 13 — Physicians of No Value — Job Refuses to Lie for God, Turns to the Almighty, and Says the Line That Anchors the Book: Though He Slay Me, Yet Will I Trust in Him

Job 13: still answering Zophar's second speech, Job dismisses the three friends as forgers of lies and physicians of no value, charges them with speaking wickedly and deceitfully to defend God, turns from them to plead his case directly with the Almighty, and voices the book's cornerstone confession of trust that survives without resolution — 'though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' Job the man of Uz, in the land east of Israel, in the patriarchal age (scriptural setting; the poem's date is debated).

Job is not finished. Chapter 12 opened his reply to Zophar with a sarcasm that still stings — "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you" — and chapter 13 carries that same reply straight through, without a breath. The friends have made their rounds now. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, each in turn, have pressed the one idea they came with: that suffering is the wage of sin, that a righteous man does not lose everything, that Job's catastrophe is therefore a verdict on Job's hidden guilt. It is tidy theology. It is also, the reader already knows from chapters 1 and 2, exactly wrong.

Hebrew Word Studies

rophe (H7495) / taphel + sheqer (H2950/H8267) (רָפָה / טָפַל שֶׁקֶר) — to heal, physician / to plaster/smear + falsehood, lie v. 4. The two accusations in verse 4 are a matched pair, and the Hebrew sharpens both. *Rophe* is the ordinary word for a physician or healer — the very word behind the LORD's own name-title, "I am the LORD that healeth thee," *Yahweh-rophe* (Ex. 15:26). Job's friends are anti-healers, holders of the healer's office who deliver the opposite of healing; the man of God who really is a physician is the one Job will turn to in the next breath. And *taphel* is the plasterer's verb — to smear a coating over a surface — the same root Ezekiel uses for prophets who daub a flimsy wall with "untempered mortar" so it looks solid until it falls (Ezek. 13:10–11). Wed it to *sheqer*, "falsehood," and you have men plastering lies over the cracks in their theology. This is the chapter's quiet thesis about bad comfort: it is cosmetic, not curative. It covers the wound instead of cleaning it, and calls the covering wisdom. Job would rather have the honest crack than the dishonest plaster — and so, it turns out, would God (42:7).

mishpat (H4941) (מִשְׁפָּט) — judgment, legal case, justice, right — a plea brought to court v. 18. The courtroom is not a metaphor Job reaches for casually — it is the frame of the whole chapter. In verse 8 he asks whether the friends will "contend for God," take up his side in a legal dispute; then in verse 18 he declares, "I have ordered my cause" — laid out my legal case — where "cause" is *mishpat*, the great Old Testament word for a judgment, a legal cause, a claim of right. Job is not merely grieving; he is filing suit. He wants a *mishpat*: a proper hearing, evidence weighed, a verdict rendered by the true Judge rather than by three self-appointed ones. And here is the ache under the word — Job knows he cannot really summon God to court ("how should man be just with God? ... he is not a man, as I am," 9:2, 32), yet he demands the hearing anyway, because the alternative is to accept the friends' false verdict in silence. The book's resolution honors the instinct: God does finally *answer* Job out of the whirlwind (38:1), not with the itemized justice Job requested, but with a presence — which turns out to be the real *mishpat* a suffering saint needs. The same longing runs straight to Gethsemane, where One who truly was innocent brought his cause to the Father and received, not an explanation, but strengthening (Luke 22:42–43).

yachal (H3176) (יָחַל) — to wait, to hope, to trust — to lean toward an expected deliverance v. 15. The verb under "yet will I trust in him" is *yachal*, and it is a load-bearing word to know here, because it is not blind acceptance — it is *hope that waits*. *Yachal* is the verb of the man on the wall watching for morning, of Israel told to "hope in the LORD" through the long night ("let Israel hope in the LORD ... more than they that watch for the morning," Ps. 130:7, 6). It leans forward. It expects. So Job's great line is not "though he slay me, I will grimly submit" — it is "though he slay me, I will keep *hoping toward* him," keep leaning on him as the one who will yet come through, even from the far side of death. That is why the verse can hold trust and complaint in the same hand: *yachal* is not the absence of a question but the refusal to stop expecting God in spite of it. The Restoration puts words to exactly this posture in Liberty Jail, when the Prophet's own "O God, where art thou?" (D&C 121:1) — a cry as raw as anything in Job — is met not with an explanation but with a summons to keep waiting on God: "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). And it is the faith of the three young men before the furnace, who said "our God ... is able to deliver us," and then, without dropping their trust, added the hardest three words in scripture: "but if not" (Dan. 3:17–18). *Yachal* is the "but if not" that still hopes.

yeshuah (H3444) (יֵשׁוּעַ, הַ) — **salvation, deliverance, rescue, victory v. 16.** "He also shall be my *salvation*" — the noun is *yeshuah*, and it is the same word that gives us the name *Yehoshua/Yeshua* — Joshua, and Jesus, "for he shall save his people" (Matt. 1:21). Sitting on the ash heap, stripped of children, health, and reputation, Job stakes his rescue on God — and does it in the very word that will one day be a person's name. Notice what he does *not* mean by it: not that God will restore his cattle, though that comes (42:10), and not merely that his body will be spared, which he doubts. Job's *yeshuah* is deeper and stranger — that God himself, the God who may slay him, is also the God who will be his deliverance; that his rescue and his afflicter are the same hand. It is the seed of the confession that flowers six chapters later into the book's greatest verse — "I know that my redeemer liveth" (19:25) — the same reach toward a *goel*, a rescuer who reaches down where Job cannot climb up. And it is the Old Testament's steady witness that *yeshuah* is never something we manufacture: "the LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Ex. 15:2); "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Ex. 14:13). Job cannot save himself from the ash heap or from the friends' verdict. He does the only thing faith can do — he names the God who wounds him as the God who will save him, and waits.

From the Chapter's Architecture

Watch the addressee shift, because it carries the whole point. Job talks to the friends about God, then talks about pleading with God, then talks directly to God. The chapter is a man walking out of the counsel of men and into the presence of God — leaving the courtroom of human opinion, where he has been tried and convicted on false evidence, to appeal his case to the only Judge who deals in truth. It is not a chiasm, and I won't dress it as one; the artistry here is directional, a steady turning of the face from the wrong audience to the right one. The friends get the first twelve verses and then vanish from Job's attention entirely. By verse 24 there is no one in the room but Job and the God whose face is hidden — which is exactly where the book has been driving him, and exactly where, in the end, God will meet him.