

Job 14 — If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again? — Job's Meditation on Human Frailty, the Tree That Sprouts Again, and a Question Left Open in the Dark

Job 14: still answering Zophar, Job turns from his friends to God directly and delivers the Bible's great meditation on the shortness and sorrow of human life — a flower cut down, a shadow that does not stay. He sets a felled tree that can revive at the scent of water against a man who dies and is gone, and raises the question the whole book is circling — 'If a man die, shall he live again?' — then aches for a hidden grave and a set time, before the chapter closes back in grief. Patriarchal era, the land of Uz; the drama is timeless, the dating deliberately vague.

The friends have taken their turns, and their comfort has curdled into accusation. Eliphaz, Bildad, and now Zophar have each pressed the same tidy machinery on Job: the righteous prosper, the wicked suffer, so if you are suffering, look to your sin. Job has just finished flinging that logic back at them — "ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value" (Job 13:4) — and then, mid-chapter, he stopped talking to them altogether and turned his face to God. Chapter 14 is the tail of that turn. Job is no longer arguing with men; he is thinking out loud in the presence of heaven, and what comes out is not a rebuttal but a lament so honest and so beautiful that funerals have borrowed its opening line for three thousand years.

Hebrew Word Studies

adam / enosh (H120) (אָדָם / עֲנוֹשׁ) — man, humankind — the earth-creature vv. 1, 10. The word Job opens with is *adam* — not a proud title but a humble one, the "man" whose very name echoes *adamah*, the ground, the red dust he was formed from and returns to ("dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," Gen. 3:19). To be *adam* is to be *of the earth* — grown from it like the flower of v. 2, cut down back into it. Job is not insulting the human race; he is locating it. When he says "born of a woman" he adds the other bookend: we arrive through another's labor and pain, we do not author ourselves, we are handed into a life we did not ask for and cannot keep. By verse 10 the word returns — "but *man* dieth, and wasteth away" — closing the frame he opened, dust to dust. This is the same clear-eyed reckoning that lets a Nephite prophet say "all men... must unavoidably perish" apart from the Redeemer (2 Ne. 9:6), and lets King Benjamin call us "less than the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 2:25) — not to crush us, but to make the mercy that reaches for such a creature look as astonishing as it truly is.

tsits / tsel (H6731 / H6738) (צִיץ / צֶלַע) — flower, blossom / shadow, shade v. 2. Job's two pictures of a human life are chosen with a poet's precision. *Tsits* is the flower — but specifically the *blossom*, the burst of beauty that is by its nature the shortest-lived thing the plant does. It is the same word Isaiah uses for the fading flower of grass (Isa. 40:7–8, "the flower fadeth... but the word of our God shall stand for ever"). Beauty here is not the opposite of frailty; it is the frailty — the bloom and the falling are the same event, seen a day apart. *Tsel* is the shadow, and it is even more fleeting than the flower, because a shadow is not even a thing — it is the shape a thing throws, gone the instant the object moves or the light shifts, and it leaves nothing behind. "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (1 Chr. 29:15). Job stacks the two: we are as brief as a blossom and as substanceless as a shadow. And yet — this is the quiet hinge of Restoration hope — the being that casts the shadow is not the shadow. The mortal frame is the fleeting thing; the *nephesh* that wears it (v. 22) is not. Job cannot yet see that far. But the very grief of these verses is the grief of someone who senses that a shadow ought to be more than a shadow.

ets / chalaph / reyach (H6086 / H2498 / H7381) (עֵץ / חָלַף / רֵיחַ) — tree / to sprout anew, pass on, change / scent, fragrance vv. 7, 9. Three words carry the tree's stubborn hope. *Ets* is the tree, the whole standing thing, but Job's point is what survives when the tree is *not* standing — the root and stump left in the ground. *Chalaph* is the verb of verse 7, "it will sprout again": a rich word that means to pass on, to change, to renew — the very same root Job will pick up in verse 14 for "till my change come." Watch that: the tree *chalaphs* — it changes, it comes again — and Job's deepest longing in v. 14 is that a man might *chalaph* too. The word he uses for the tree's second spring is the word he reaches for when he dares to hope for his own. And *reyach* is the tenderest of the three — the "scent" of water. Not a flood, not even a rain — a *scent*, the faintest rumor of moisture, and the dead-looking root answers it. *Reyach* is the word for the fragrance of an offering that pleases God (Gen. 8:21) and for the smell of a field the Lord has blessed (Gen. 27:27). Job is saying: a stump revives on almost nothing — a hint, a whiff, a promise of water. His unspoken cry is the ache of every believer at a graveside — if a tree will answer the mere *scent* of water, will not the God who made the tree answer the scent of a returning soul?

chalaph / chayah / tsava (H2487 / H2421 / H6635) (חָלַף / חָיָה / צָוָה) — change, renewal, relief / to live, revive / appointed time, warfare, hard service v. 14. Verse 14 is built from three words that turn a question into a hope. *Chalaph* — here the noun "change" — is the very verb that described the tree sprouting again in verse 7. Job has quietly done something profound: he takes the word for the tree's revival and applies it to himself. "Till my *change* come" is "till I sprout again as the tree does." The image of the felled stump has become his own prayer. *Chayah* is the verb "live" in "shall he live *again*" — the root of life itself, the word behind "the living God" and behind every restored breath in scripture; it is the verb Elijah prayed over a dead boy (1 Kgs. 17:22) and the state the resurrection will restore. And *tsava* — "my appointed time" — is a soldier's word: it means a term of warfare, an appointed hard service, a tour of duty (it is the "hosts" in "LORD of hosts"). Job is not idly killing time in the grave; he is standing his watch, serving out an appointed campaign, waiting for the relief that ends the shift. The Restoration names the change he could only long for: "the spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form" (Alma 40:23), and "this mortal body is raised to an immortal body... they can die no more" (Alma 11:45). Job's *chalaph* is Alma's reunion; his soldier's watch is our "wait on the Lord" with the answer already given.

tiqvah (H8615) (תִּקְוָה) — hope, expectation — literally a cord, a thing stretched out toward vv. 7, 19. One word brackets the chapter's central struggle, and its journey tells the whole story. *Tiqvah* — "hope" — comes from a root meaning to stretch out, to bind, even a *cord* (it is literally the "line" of scarlet thread Rahab hung from her window, Josh. 2:18, 21). Hope, in Hebrew, is a lifeline flung across a gap — something you throw toward a future you cannot yet reach and hold onto. In verse 7 Job grants this *tiqvah* to the tree: "there is *hope* of a tree." In verse 19 he mourns that God "destroyest the *hope* [*tiqvah*] of man." The same cord that holds the stump to its second spring seems, to Job's grief, to be cut for the man. But the word itself refuses to stay buried. It is *tiqvah* that Jeremiah's God speaks over the exiles — "to give you an expected end," an *end of hope* (Jer. 29:11) — and *tiqvah* that Proverbs promises the righteous (Prov. 23:18). And it is precisely this cord, seemingly cut in Job 14, that Job will grip in Job 19 when he cries "I know that my redeemer liveth." The Restoration ties the line off for good: "ye shall have a perfect brightness of hope" (2 Ne. 31:20). Job in chapter 14 is a man who has thrown the cord into the dark and cannot yet feel it catch. It catches. Just not yet.

From the Chapter's Architecture

But there is a hidden pivot, and everything hinges on it: verse 14, the question. The two halves of the chapter lean toward it and away from it like water toward a drain. Before it, Job builds the case that death looks final. At it, he dares to ask whether it is. After it, for one verse (15), he glimpses the reunion — and then the doubt reasserts and the chapter sinks toward mourning. The architecture, in other words, enacts the very thing the chapter is about: hope surfacing in the middle of grief, and grief closing over it again. The book will not leave it there. But chapter 14 does, and its unfinished shape is a promise that the question has been asked — and a question, once truly asked, is already reaching for its answer.