

Job 23 — When He Hath Tried Me — The Hidden God, the Day in Court That Never Comes, and the Refiner's Gold

Job 23: Job answers Eliphaz a second time. Bruised by his friends and abandoned, so it feels, by heaven, he longs to find God's courtroom and plead his cause — certain of a fair hearing — yet finds God nowhere: not forward, not backward, not left, not right. Out of that absence comes the book's most famous confession of trust: 'when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold' (23:10). The dialogue cycle of Job and his three friends, wisdom literature set in the patriarchal age of Uz.

By chapter 23 the argument has worn a groove. Three friends have taken turns explaining Job's suffering with a single blunt syllogism — God is just, God punishes sin, therefore Job's ruin proves Job's guilt — and Job has spent every reply refusing the equation without being able to disprove it. Eliphaz has just finished his harshest speech yet (ch. 22), openly inventing crimes for Job to have committed. And Job, instead of answering Eliphaz point for point, does something the friends never do: he turns away from them entirely and addresses the empty chair where God should be sitting. That reorientation is the whole chapter. Job stops arguing with men about God and starts aching for God himself.

Hebrew Word Studies

***mishpat* (H4941) (מִשְׁפָּט) — judgment, cause, legal case, justice, the right ruling v. 4.** "I would order my cause before him." *Mishpat* is one of the load-bearing words of the Hebrew Bible — it means a legal case, but also the just verdict that case deserves, and beyond that the whole ordered rightness God builds into the world. When Job says he would set his *mishpat* in order, he is not merely asking to complain; he is asking for justice as a thing that can be examined, weighed, and vindicated. The word runs from Abraham's challenge — "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?" (Gen. 18:25) — through the prophets' cry to "let judgment run down as waters" (Amos 5:24), to the Servant who "shall bring forth judgment unto truth" (Isa. 42:3). Job's tragedy in this chapter is that he believes in *mishpat* with his whole heart and cannot find the courtroom where it is administered. He is not wrong about the justice; he is only unable, yet, to reach the Judge. The book's resolution is that the God of *mishpat* was never actually absent from Job's case — "he knoweth the way that I take" (v. 10) is the same conviction spoken from the other side of the silence.

***sathar* (H5848 / cf. root s-t-r) — "he hideth himself" (סָתַר / הִסְתַּר) — to hide, conceal, cover, wrap oneself away v. 9.** The verb behind "he hideth himself on the right hand" belongs to the Bible's rich vocabulary of the hidden God — the *Deus absconditus* of Isaiah's "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself" (Isa. 45:15). Hebrew has more than one root for this concealment, and Job's speech reaches for the sense of God wrapping himself away, turning aside so that even a searching eye "cannot see him." What matters theologically is that the hiding is God's *act*, not Job's failure — Job's foot has held God's steps (v. 11); the fault is not in his searching. Scripture never treats the hiding of God as abandonment. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:7–8). The hidden face is a season, not a sentence. And the deepest Restoration comfort answers Job here directly: to the prophet in Liberty Jail, cut off and unable to find the God whose work he could plainly see, the word came, "thou art not yet as Job" (D&C 121:10) — and then the promise that "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7). The God who hides is refining, not deserting.

***bachan* (H974) (בָּחַן) — to test, to try, to assay (specifically, to prove metal in fire) v. 10.** This is the exact right word, and it changes everything. *Bachan* is not the generic word for trouble or affliction; it is the metallurgist's term — to *assay*, to test metal by fire in order to prove and certify its purity. When Job says "when he hath *tried* me, I shall come forth as gold," he is naming his suffering with the vocabulary of the refinery, not the courtroom of the condemned. The distinction is the whole quarrel of the book. The friends read Job's fire as a *verdict* — proof of guilt burned into the ledger. Job, reaching past them, reads it as an *assay* — a proving of worth, not a sentence for sin. And Israel's God claims exactly this word for himself: "the LORD trieth (*bachan*) the hearts" (Prov. 17:3, in the very verse that pairs it with the refining of silver and gold); "examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try (*bachan*) my reins and my heart" (Ps. 26:2). The assay is never to destroy the metal but to reveal it. This is the reading the Restoration seals fast: "I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (1 Ne. 20:10) — chosen *in* the furnace, not spared it. Malachi saw the Lord himself as the assayer: "he is like a refiner's fire... and he shall purify... and purge them as gold and silver" (Mal. 3:2–3). Job did not have those texts. He had only the confidence, spoken into the dark, that the fire he could not understand was in the hands of a Refiner who knew exactly what he was doing.

tsaphan (H6845) (צָפַן) — to hide, to treasure up, to store away as something precious v. 12. "I have *esteemed* the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." The Hebrew verb *tsaphan* means to hide — but in the sense of *treasuring up*, storing away what is precious, the way one hides gold or hoards seed for the famine. The King James "esteemed" catches the value; the Hebrew adds the intimacy of *keeping close*. There is a quiet irony worth pausing on: in verse 9 God "hideth himself" from Job, and here in verse 12 Job "hides" — treasures — God's words in his heart. The God who has concealed his face has not concealed his *word*, and it is the treasured word that carries Job through the concealment. This is precisely the Psalmist's practice: "Thy word have I hid (*tsaphan*) in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). When the presence is withdrawn, the word remains — hidden away, load-bearing, more necessary than food. Job's refining works because something in him was already stored up against the fire. And the Restoration turns the same instinct into a promise: "treasure up in your minds continually the words of life" (D&C 84:85), so that in the hour you cannot find God's face, you will still have his word hidden in your heart.

bahal (H926) (בָּהַל) — to be dismayed, terrified, troubled, thrown into trembling v. 15. "Therefore am I *troubled* at his presence." *Bahal* is a strong word — not mere unease but dismay, the trembling of one overwhelmed, the same verb used when armies are thrown into panic. Job is not mildly uncomfortable; he is undone before the face he longed to see. And this is theologically vital: the assurance of verse 10 does not dissolve the *bahal* of verse 15. The Bible never lets the fear of God and the trust in God cancel each other out; it keeps them welded together as the two halves of reverence. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10) is not the beginning of terror-that-flees but of awe-that-draws-near-trembling. When the risen Christ appears, even beloved John "fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. 1:17) — and then heard "Fear not." The dread is real; it is simply not the last word. Job holds the harder, truer posture: he will come forth as gold, and he is afraid of the Refiner, and both convictions live in the same heart. Anyone who has stood at the edge of real holiness knows he is telling the truth.

From the Chapter's Architecture

That shape is the point. A lesser writer would have ended on the gold of verse 10 and sent everyone home comforted. The book of Job ends the chapter on darkness instead, because the gold is not a resolution — it is a conviction held inside the darkness, not a rescue from it. The structure preaches the theology: assurance and dread, treasured word and hidden face, are not sequential stages you graduate through but simultaneous realities you learn to hold together. Verse 10 does not cancel verse 17; verse 17 does not falsify verse 10. The architecture of the chapter is the architecture of mature faith.