

THE CONTEXT :: Job 12-14 is Job responding to the advice of his friend Zophar. In chapter 11 the later explained to Job that God's wisdom is a mystery, hidden in the magnitude of creation. When we think something is foolish or evil, how can we know for God creates the light and the dark. But in that cosmological observation, Zophar also exhorts Job to come out as a sinner, to recognize that he is not upright, pure and righteous; to recognize the sin in his life, to confess it whether he's unaware of it, or wants to deny it. Here is the beginning of his speech in Job 11:5-12.

⁵ But O that God would speak,
and open his lips to you,
⁶ and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!
For wisdom is many-sided.
Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.
⁷ "Can you find out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?
⁸ It is higher than heaven—what can you do?
Deeper than *Sheol*—what can you know?
⁹ Its measure is longer than the earth,
and broader than the sea.
¹⁰ If he passes through, and imprisons,
and assembles for judgment, who can hinder him?
¹¹ For he knows those who are worthless;
when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?
¹² But a stupid person will get understanding,
when a *wild ass* is born human.

wild ass :: The author uses a "wild ass" as a metaphor used throughout the book (first in 6:5 unto the end in 39:5-8), His analogy turns on the assumption that the only good ass is a domesticated one. This is rooted on the theological notion of God's creation and creative work is bringing order from chaos. The wilderness (that which isn't domesticated) is synonymous with outlaw country, chaos in all of its unstructured and life-threatening power. Curiously the Hebrew term *toho* (meaning without form, used in Genesis 1:2) often is used in the First Testament to describes the wilderness (or desert) – that which is not part of God's promise.

The apostle Paul also talks of God's wisdom in a similar way when he attempts to explain how the smart people of his age were not able to recognize God in Jesus. "But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory." 1 Corinthians 2:7

tree : The tree is a symbol of hope renewed. For when a tree is cut down it can sprout anew with the gift of life-sustaining water. Job (and other Biblical writers) see the tree (and nature) as a manifestation of the sustaining, renewing and redeeming ways of God. The tree points towards hope. Yet Job ultimately concludes that what works for a tree in nature, will not for him in his humanity.

The analogy of the tree first arises in Job 8:11-19 and is used to talk about those who do evil, forgetting God, choosing another way, growing like roots among rocks. The word **sprout** (YAHLEP in Hebrew) used in 14:7 as a verb is also used in Isaiah 40:31 with the meaning of renew:

²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
³¹ but those who wait for the Lord shall **renew** their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint."

Job 14:7-15; 19:23-27
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JOB RESPONDING TO THE ADVICE OF HIS FRIEND
ZOPHAR (IN JOB 11)

14 ⁷ "For there is hope for a ~~tree~~,
if it is cut down, that it will **sprout**
again,
and that its shoots will not cease.
⁸ Though its root grows old in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
⁹ yet at **the scent of water** it will bud
and put forth branches like a young
plant.
¹⁰ But mortals die, and are laid low;
humans expire, and where are they?
¹¹ As waters fail from a lake,
and a river wastes away and dries up,
¹² so mortals lie down and do not rise
again;
until the heavens are no more, they will
not awake
or be roused out of their sleep.
¹³ O that you would hide me in *Sheol*,
that you would conceal me until your
wrath is past,
that you would appoint me a set time,
and remember me!
¹⁴ If mortals die, will they live again?
All the days of my service I would wait
until my release should come.
¹⁵ You would call, and I would answer
you;

19²³ “O that my words were written down!

O that they were inscribed in a book!

²⁴ O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock forever!

²⁵ For I know that **my Redeemer** lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the **DUST**;

²⁶ and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,

²⁷ whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

My heart faints within me!

Romans 8:26-38

New Revised Standard Version | (NRSV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own

THE CONTEXT :: Job 15 is the second response of Job's friend Eliphaz to Job's dilemma. He tells Job that he's full of hot air. Job has told him in 13:4-12 that their religion (of the friends) is a cover-up for God, denying the challenging truth of human existence, which is constantly plagued and attached by the forces of chaos (those opposed to the will and purpose of God). Eliphaz thus condemns Job as irreligious and disrespectful. His lack of piety, in complaining both about and too God, will bring an end to the worship of the Divine. Job responds to Eliphaz in Job 16-17, asserting that his friends, rather than comforting him, are conspiring against him, negating his experience and his evolving relationship with God in which Job can complain to being targeted by God's wrath and yet still worship and fear God.

Job 18 is the second time that the friend Bildad speaks to and against Job. He tells Job off for daring to think that God doesn't simply expel the wicked from creation and destroy the place they once occupied. He accuses Job of joining words together in order to ensnare his God-fearing friends in subversive talk. (see 15:4, 16:4 and 18:7-10). Bildad rejects Job, telling him that he will not catch Bildad up in such foolishness, Job will only bring about his own downfall.

By the time we start chapter 19 (when Job speaks anew, responding to Bildad) Job feels totally abandoned by friends, relatives, servants, family and God – anyone who may play the role of kin redeemer. Job has searched everywhere in his actual world for such a redeemer (read 19:5-22) to no avail.

my Redeemer:: Many Christian readers of this passage jump instantly to the idea that these verses point to an affirmation of bodily resurrection, hinting at the victorious Messiah to come in Jesus of Nazareth. Ancient readers point to 14:13-17, and the despairing end of Job 14 as an assertion that Job is saying his hope is in resurrection. Rather his hope is placed in affirming that behind the God of violence tragically manifest in the world, stands the God of righteousness and love – and they are not two but one. Thus, Job's attack upon conventional religion is actually the expression of deepest trust.' (Robert Gordis. *The Book of Job*. p.527).

DUST :: This section in Job is highly evocative. Does Job find hope in the promise of the Messiah, or in the invitation to participate with God in the ongoing work of creation: bringing order from chaos? Or both? The wording in this verse evokes the biblical understanding of human life, best summarized in Genesis 3:19 "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Curiously Job reverses the order from dust to life and back to dust, to life to dust and back to life. His hope is that from the dust, his life will be renewed, sprouting anew, like the tree in Job 14:1.

Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

*"For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

AS YOU READ AND REFLECT ON THIS TEXT:

↵ When have you felt trapped in doubt, plagued by the thought that God is either targeting you or not protecting you?

↵ How have you experienced the wisdom of God as a mystery in life? How are you experiencing that today?

↵ Paul says not only that Christ is victorious, but that we are victorious through him. Yet the victory is different than we describe in human terms. How do you long for, need to see or be reminded that we – you – are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus?

ROMANS: THE CONTEXT :: Putting Paul's letter to the church in ancient Rome is not exactly fair. It's forcing a Christian reading upon the text of Job, which deserves to be read on its own.

Some of the foundational connections between the two texts are the emphasis on hope – like the tree that sprouts anew because of the life-giving water that God provides mysteriously despite all appearances. Paul talks about that hope as the renewal of those who place their trust in God – even when they see only persecution, evil, injustice and darkness. Remember he's writing to Christians in the Roman Empire who were knowingly choosing to worship not the Lord and Savior Augustus who brought the Roman Empire out of civil war to create a new kingdom on earth, but rather they entrusting all of their life and the lives of their loved ones into the hands of the Lord and Savior who brought peace through his own violent death and resurrection to life which subverted all known notions of power, strength, and order.

Paul writes that there is hope against the disorder, or chaos, that continues (since the first movement of creation) to threaten us, to destabilize the work that God began by speaking his word into the *toho bohu* (un-tamed and un-ordered) chaos of the darkness before creation. That same spoken Word is the Living Word that we worship as Jesus, Lord of All, who brings all things together for the good of creation.

While this is quite different than the conclusion of Job, who through his travails and painful journey comes to discover that how he envisioned God was too small and inadequate: trapped in ancient boxes, moored in a disrespectful silence that didn't engage God in dialogue, in a naïve quid-pro-quo notion of God's blessing and human prosperity as tied to sinless living. Paul and Job both exhort us to join in the ongoing work of the Living God in creation (bringing order from creation) spoken in both creation and the incarnation, continuing in the world today, in our lives.