

Job 13:20-14
May 24, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Job talks a lot about human frailty and shortness of life. What tends to make people think seriously about mortality? [Let people engage]

Transition:

Awareness of mortality can either drive us to despair or push us to seek meaning and hope. In chapter 14, Job is wrestling with his mortality. After all his suffering, he reflects on how fragile and brief human life feels, and he doesn't hold back in expressing his thoughts and questions honestly before God. I think we are going to read a very honest picture of what suffering faith can sound like. Let's begin.

BOOK:

²⁰ “Only grant me these two things, O God,
and then I will not hide from you:
²¹ Withdraw your hand far from me,
and stop frightening me with your terrors.
²² Then summon me and I will answer,
or let me speak, and you reply.
²³ How many wrongs and sins have I committed?
Show me my offense and my sin.
²⁴ Why do you hide your face
and consider me your enemy?
²⁵ Will you torment a windblown leaf?
Will you chase after dry chaff?
²⁶ For you write down bitter things against me
and make me inherit the sins of my youth.
²⁷ You fasten my feet in shackles;
you keep close watch on all my paths
by putting marks on the soles of my feet.
²⁸ “So man wastes away like something rotten,
like a garment eaten by moths.

14 “Man born of woman
is of few days and full of trouble.
² He springs up like a flower and withers away;
like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure.
³ Do you fix your eye on such a one?
Will you bring him before you for judgment?
⁴ Who can bring what is pure from the impure?
No one!
⁵ Man's days are determined;

you have decreed the number of his months
and have set limits he cannot exceed.

⁶ So look away from him and let him alone,
till he has put in his time like a hired man.

⁷ “At least there is hope for a tree:
If it is cut down, it will sprout again,
and its new shoots will not fail.

⁸ Its roots may grow old in the ground
and its stump die in the soil,

⁹ yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth shoots like a plant.

¹⁰ But man dies and is laid low;
he breathes his last and is no more.

¹¹ As water disappears from the sea
or a riverbed becomes parched and dry,

¹² so man lies down and does not rise;
till the heavens are no more, men will not awake
or be roused from their sleep.

¹³ “If only you would hide me in the grave (Sheol)
and conceal me till your anger has passed!
If only you would set me a time
and then remember me!

¹⁴ If a man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my hard service
I will wait for my renewal (or release) to come.

¹⁵ You will call and I will answer you;
you will long for the creature your hands have made.

¹⁶ Surely then you will count my steps
but not keep track of my sin.

¹⁷ My offenses will be sealed up in a bag;
you will cover over my sin.

¹⁸ “But as a mountain erodes and crumbles
and as a rock is moved from its place,

¹⁹ as water wears away stones
and torrents wash away the soil,
so you destroy man’s hope.

²⁰ You overpower him once for all, and he is gone;
you change his countenance and send him away.

²¹ If his sons are honored, he does not know it;
if they are brought low, he does not see it.

²² He feels but the pain of his own body
and mourns only for himself.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

God invites honest prayer, even in deep suffering. Job speaks with remarkable honesty. He questions, laments, pleads, and even argues, yet he continues directing his words toward God rather than away from Him. Faith is not pretending everything is fine. Believers can bring confusion, grief, fear, and hard questions to God honestly.

Human life is fragile and limited. Job compares human life to flowers that fade and shadows that disappear. He confronts mortality directly and recognizes how brief life is. Awareness of life's brevity should shape priorities, relationships, and dependence on God. It challenges people to live wisely instead of assuming unlimited time.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *Be Patient*. (pp. 52-55) Victor Books

(3) *Desire (vv. 18–28)*. These words are addressed to God. Job has “prepared his case” (v. 18, NIV) and is sure that he will win. Job has two desires: that God would remove His chastening hand and give Job relief, and that God would come to Job in such a way that He would not frighten him. Job is asking God to meet him in court so they can talk over God’s “case” against Job and Job’s “case” against God. In verse 22, Job gives God the option of speaking first!

Why does Job want to meet God in court? So that God can once and for all state His “case” against Job and let Job know the sins in his life that have caused him to suffer so much. “Why should God pay so much attention to me?” asks Job. “He treats me like an enemy, but I’m just a weak leaf in the wind, a piece of chaff that is worth nothing. I’m a piece of rotting wood and a moth-eaten garment, yet God treats me like a prisoner of war and watches me every minute.” Job felt the time had come to settle the matter, even if it meant losing his own life in the process.

***The hopelessness of Job (Job 14)*.** Zophar had assured Job that there was hope for him if only he would acknowledge his sins and repent (Job 11:13–20). But Zophar was not in Job’s situation! From Job’s point of view, his future was bleak. In verses 1–12, Job used several images to illustrate the hopeless condition of man in this world. He is like a flower that is soon cut down, a shadow that slowly disappears, a hired man that puts in his time and then is replaced. God knows the limits of our days (7:1; 14:5; Ps. 139:16). A suicide may foolishly hasten the day of death, but nobody will go beyond the limits that God has set for his or her life.

Since man is only a flower, a shadow, and a servant, why should God pay any attention to him? Since life is so short, why should God fill man’s few days with grief and pain? “So look away from him and let him alone,” prays Job (Job 14:6, NIV). “Let me have some peace before my brief life ends!” (paraphrase)

Job’s strongest image is that of the tree (vv. 7–12). Chop it down, and its stump remains, and there is always a possibility that the tree might sprout again. The tree has hope, but man has no hope. When he dies, he leaves no stump behind. Man is more like water that evaporates or soaks into the ground; it can never be recovered again (v. 11; 2 Sam. 14:14). Man may lie down at night and awaken in the morning; but when he lies down in death, there is no assurance that he will be awakened again.

Early believers like Job did not have the revelation of future life as we now have it in Christ (2 Tim. 1:10). Passages in the Old Testament hint at future resurrection (Pss. 16:9–11; 17:15; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2), but Job did not have any of these books to read and ponder. “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14) Job asked this important question but did not answer it. Later on, Job will make a great statement about future resurrection (19:25–26); but at this point he is vacillating between despair and hope.

In 14:13, Job asked God to give Himself a reminder to bring Job back from Sheol, the realm of the dead. Job was probably not thinking of resurrection, but of a brief return to earth so God could vindicate him before his accusers. Of course, a believer today is sealed by the Holy Spirit

unto the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13–14); and God will not forget one of His children at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50–58).

Job reminded the Lord that he was the work of God’s hands (Job 14:15), an argument he had used before (10:3). It seemed to Job that, instead of caring for His creature, God was doing nothing but keeping a record of his sins. What hope could Job have as long as God was investigating him and building a case against him? Instead of cleansing Job’s sins, God was covering them and would not even tell Job what they were!

“Thou destroyest the hope of man,” Job complained (14:19), and he used two illustrations to make his point. Man seems like a sturdy mountain, but the water gradually erodes the rock, and it eventually crumbles. Or an earthquake might suddenly move the rocks from one place to another and change the mountain. Death may come gradually or suddenly, but it will come; and man will go to a world where he knows nothing about what his family is doing. Job longed for that release from sorrow and pain.

When people are experiencing intense grief and pain, it is easy for them to feel that the future is hopeless and that God has forsaken them. The eminent American psychiatrist Karl Menninger called hope “the major weapon against the suicide impulse.” Hopeless people feel that life is not worth living since they have nothing to look forward to but suffering and failure. They conclude that it is better for them to die than to live and be a burden to themselves and to others.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche called hope “the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torments of man.” But an individual who believes in Jesus Christ shares in a “living hope” that grows more wonderful every day (1 Peter 1:3ff). Dead hopes fade away because they have no roots, but our “living hope” gets better because it is rooted in the living Christ and His Living Word. The assurance of resurrection and life in glory with Christ is a strong motivation for us to keep going even when the going is tough (1 Cor. 15:58).

Charles L. Allen has written, “When you say a situation or a person is hopeless, you are slamming the door in the face of God.” Job had not yet slammed the door, but he was getting close to doing it; and his friends were not helping him at all.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:13, NASB).

Zuck, R. B. (1985). *Job*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 735-736) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

b. Job’s presentation of his case to God (13:20–28)

13:20–28. Having stated his readiness to present his own self-defense at the risk of God’s striking him dead, Job then turned to **God** with his argumentation. But first he requested that God not intimidate him (cf. **terror[s]** in 9:34; 18:11), the defendant, in court. It was only right that he be given a fair trial (cf. 9:16–19). **Then** Job offered to meet God as either defendant or

plaintiff. But when he asked God to enumerate his **sins** (cf. 6:24), God did not appear in court. Job asked God why He remained silent and considered Job His **enemy** (cf. 19:11; 33:10). **To torment a ... leaf or chase after ... chaff** was to molest the worthless, to hit a frail, helpless person who was down. Why, Job wondered, should God conjure up past **sins** of his adolescence and punish him for them? There was no sin at the present that deserved such terrible affliction. Why would God treat him like a prisoner, watching him closely (cf. 7:19–20; 10:14; 31:4) and marking his **feet** so He could trace Job's steps? After this sudden dash of daring, Job quickly subsided into a feeling of despair, continuing to pine away like a **rotten** moth-eaten **garment**.

c. Job's despair of hope (chap. 14)

In a sudden shift of mood, Job turned from confidence that he could win his court case against God to a melancholy lament about life's futility and death's certainty.

(1) The brevity of life (14:1–6).

14:1–4. Man's **few days** are troublesome (the Heb. for **trouble**—the same word *rōḡez* rendered “turmoil” in 3:17, 26—means agitation), and brief (cf. 7:6, 9; 9:25–26; 10:20; 14:5; 17:1) **like a** withering **flower** and fading **shadow** (cf. 8:9; Ecc. 6:12), constantly under God's scrutiny (cf. Job 7:20), and basically **impure** (cf. 9:30–31; 25:4).

14:5–6. Not only is **man's** life short; his **days** and **months** are **determined** by God, with time **limits** beyond which **he cannot** go. Since man is so hemmed in and his days so ephemeral, the least God could do would be to turn **away from** gazing on man (cf. 7:19; 10:20) and not harass him.

(2) The futility of death (14:7–17).

14:7–12. When **a tree** is chopped **down it will** spring up **again**. Personifying a tree as if it had a human nose, Job spoke of a tree scenting **water** and then growing. In contrast with the world of botany man has no such hope. When he **dies and is laid low** (*hālaš*, “to be disabled or prostrate”), he is gone. (The Heb. word for **man**, v. 10, is *geber*, “strong man”; cf. v. 14. Even strong men die! **He** in v. 10b is *'ādām*, the generic term for “mankind,” and **man** in v. 12 is *'iš*, “male.”)

This does not teach annihilation (cf. comments on v. 14). It simply means that a person cannot relive his entire life on earth in the same physical body. Though in the ground, he is not like a tree **stump** which, with its **roots ... in the soil**, can spring up again. But a person *is* like **water** that evaporates; when it is gone, it cannot be retrieved. Death is final. At this point Job, in his way of seeing things, denied the possibility of physical resurrection. Death, he stated, is not a **sleep** from which people can be awakened. Soon, however, Job wondered if resurrection might be possible (v. 14).

14:13–14. Even though a buried corpse cannot normally be revived (some exceptions are recorded in the Bible, of course; cf. 1 Kings 17:17–23; 2 Kings 4:18–37; John 11:43–44; Matt. 27:52–53; 28:5–7), being **in the grave** would be, for Job, a hiding place from God's **anger** (cf.

God's anger in Job 16:9; 19:11). Job could endure that **time** if God would limit it and not forget to resurrect him. But is resurrection possible? Pondering that faint possibility—**If a man dies, will he live again?**—Job said he was willing to **wait** out his **hard service**—(*šābā'*, “military service,” also translated “hard service” in 7:1; Isa. 40:2) in this life, anticipating his “release” (NIV the Heb. for **renewal** is used of one group of soldiers relieving another group). Death, with its release from the burdens of this life, would be like an honorary discharge or a changing of the guard. A person continues to exist after death, for he is transferred from one condition to another.

14:15–17. Returning to the subject of legal court proceedings, Job affirmed his certainty that God would summon him to court, for He would be longing (cf. 7:21) to see Job, His “handwork” (cf. **hands** in 10:3, 8). Job said that when God spoke, he would **answer** Him. And yet when God *did* speak, Job could not answer even one of His questions (40:4–5). Though counting his **steps** (cf. 31:4) God would no longer record his **sin**, for his **offenses** would be hidden (**sealed up in a bag**). For Job such a prospect was wonderful. But in 14:18–22 he plummeted back into despondency. (3) The absence of hope (14:18–22).

14:18–20. Though Job anticipated that *death* would release him from life's woes (v. 14), still he had no hope for reprieve *before* the grave. Like a crumbling **mountain**, like **stones** worn down by **water**, and like **soil** washed **away** by rainstorms, **so** the **hope** of man (*'ēnōš*, “weak, mortal man”; cf. comments on 4:17) wears away. At death God forcibly overcomes him, changes **his countenance** (i.e., a person's face, once flush with life, becomes pallid at death), and sends **him away** from all he knew and possessed in this life.

14:21–22. In death a parent cannot see **his sons ... honored** nor can he sympathize with their problems. In his post-death life Job thought man's **pain** is physical (as **his cold body**, lit., “flesh,” is devoured by worms) and mental (he **mourns** in the sadness of his loneliness and separation). Fittingly Job ended this first bout in a morose tone, for he certainly was in pain and without hope.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Job 13:20-14:22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.