

Job 31:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

Analysis

For destruction from God was a terror to me (כִּי פִּנְדָּד אֱלֹהִים אֵיד אַל, ki faḥad elay eid El)—faḥad (תִּפְאֵרָה, terror/dread) and eid (אֵיד, calamity/destruction) are stacked for emphasis. **By reason of his highness I could not endure** (עַמְּשָׁאֵתָה לֹא אָכַל) (עַמְּשָׁאֵתָה לֹא אָכַל, umše'et lo ukhal)—se'et (תִּגְאֵשׁ, majesty/exaltation) emphasizes God's transcendent holiness. Yakol (אָכַל, able/endure) appears in negative: Job could not bear to sin against such a God.

This verse reveals Job's ultimate motivation: fear of the Lord, which is "the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Job didn't refrain from oppressing orphans merely from humanitarianism but from terror of God's judgment and inability to sin against His holiness. This anticipates the NT teaching that we work out salvation "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) and that it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). Job's godly fear produced righteous living.

Historical Context

The concept of fear of the Lord pervades Hebrew wisdom literature (Job 28:28, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7). This isn't servile terror but reverent awe before God's holiness, power, and justice. Job's fear motivated obedience—he knew that God sees all (v. 4) and will judge (v. 14). This theocentric ethic contrasts with humanistic morality grounded in social contract or utility. Job's righteousness flowed from relationship with a holy God.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 – God is love

Study Questions

1. How does cultivating 'terror' of divine destruction shape ethical decision-making differently than mere social conscience?
2. What does Job's inability to endure God's 'highness' teach about holiness as a motivation for justice toward the poor?
3. How can the church recover healthy fear of the Lord without falling into legalism or works-righteousness?

Interlinear Text

אֵלִי	אֵת	אֵל
H3588 was a terror	H413 For destruction	H410 from God

אָכָל:	ל	א	1 מְשָׁאָת	to me and by reason of his highness	H3808	I could
				H7613		H3201

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 119:120 (Parallel theme): My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

Job 13:11 (Parallel theme): Shall not his excellency make you afraid? and his dread fall upon you?

2 Corinthians 5:11 (References God): Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

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