

Job 33:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out.

Analysis

His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen (killāh běšārō mērō'î, כְּלָה בֶּשֶׁרֶת מֵרֹאִי)—The verb kālāh means to be finished, consumed, or wasted away completely. Flesh (bāsār) deteriorates until invisible (mērō'î, from seeing). The body's muscle and fat reserves deplete through wasting disease, leaving only skeletal framework. This graphic medical description depicts advanced stages of illness—possibly tuberculosis, cancer, or chronic infection common in the ancient world.

And his bones that were not seen stick out (wěšuppû 'ašmōtāyw lō' rū'û, וְשָׁׁׁעֲפָפָעַ 'אַשְׁׁמֹתָאַיְוָעַ לְׁוָעַרְעַעַ) —Previously hidden bones ('ašāmōt) now protrude visibly (šāpāh, to be bare, laid bare). The reversal is complete: flesh disappears while bones emerge. This depicts extreme emaciation where skeletal structure shows through skin. Job himself describes this condition: 'My bone cleaveth to my skin' (19:20). Physical reduction to bare bones symbolizes mortality's reality—we return to dust (Genesis 3:19).

Historical Context

Without modern nutrition and medicine, wasting diseases commonly produced the emaciation Elihu describes. Tuberculosis, malaria, dysentery, and cancer could reduce robust adults to skeletal frames within months. The visible transformation from health to emaciation was public, removing all privacy from suffering. Ancient

honor-shame cultures viewed such physical deterioration as evidence of divine disfavor, intensifying the sufferer's isolation.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does physical deterioration strip away pretense and force confrontation with human mortality and frailty?
2. What does extreme visible suffering teach about the temporary nature of earthly bodies and the need for resurrection hope?
3. How should the church respond to those whose suffering is publicly visible and may be wrongly interpreted as divine displeasure?

Interlinear Text

ל	א	ע	צָמַת	וְ	וְ	כִּל	!	בָּשָׂר	וְ	מִרְאֵי	וְ	וְשָׁפֵן	וְ	צָמַת	וְ	ל	
is consumed	away		His	flesh		that it cannot	be seen			stick	out		and	his	bones		H3808
H3615			H1320			H7210				H8192			H6106				
תָּאֹ:																	
that	were	not	seen														
																	H7200

Additional Cross-References

Job 19:20 (Parallel theme): My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.

Proverbs 5:11 (Parallel theme): And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,

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