

Job Chapter 23

Verses 23:1 – 24:25: Job's reply to Eliphaz's third speech was not a rebuttal, but express Job's longing for fellowship with God, so he could experience God's love and goodness and hear from Him the meaning of all his suffering.

This section, featuring Job's response to Eliphaz, is expressive of Job's deeply discouraged state, God's sovereignty is not a comfort to him but a terror. Echoes of his initial sadness in his opening soliloquy (3:1-26), are found here.

(In verses 1-12), we find that in spite of Job's anger toward Eliphaz, his dispute was not with humans but with God, the only One who knew the truth of his integrity (Psalm 17:3).

Job 23:1 "Then Job answered and said,"

Job replies to the insinuations of Eliphaz with the earnest longing after God and the assertion of his own innocence. While in the twenty-fourth chapter he laments that his own case is but one of many, and that multitudes suffer from the oppression of man unavenged, as he suffers from the stroke of God.

Job 23:2 "Even today [is] my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning."

I.e., I do bitterly complain, and have just cause to do so. But this clause is and may be otherwise rendered, even still (Hebrew: at this day), is my complaint called or accounted by you rebellion or bitterness, or the rage of an exasperated mind? Do you still pass such harsh censures upon me after all my declarations and solemn protestations of my innocence?

"My stroke": Hebrew: my hand. I.e., the hand or stroke of God upon me, as the same phrase is used (Psalm 77:2); and mine arrow (Job 34:6).

"Is heavier than my groaning": I.e., doth exceed all my complaints and expressions. So far are you mistaken, that think I complain more than I have cause. Some render the words thus, my hands are heavy (i.e. feeble and hanging down), as the phrase is (Heb. 12:12). My strength and spirit fails), because of my groaning.

Job had listened to his opponents' complaints about him. He knew in his heart he was not guilty of the things he had been accused of. His complaint was bitter, because he wanted to know what he had done wrong that he might change it. His suffering had been so great, that he felt he had a right to know why he was suffering so greatly.

Job 23:3 "Oh that I knew where I might find him! [that] I might come [even] to his seat!"

"His seat": A place of judgment.

It appears that Job had sought the LORD, and He had been nowhere to be found. Had he been able to find the LORD, this trial would have not been complete. I am sure God's heart was breaking also, to see such great pain suffered by so faithful a servant as Job. All believers are looking forward to that time when we can be with Him.

Job 23:4 "I would order [my] cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

“My cause”: Job’s claim to innocence.

Job was sure if he could get an audience with God that he could plead his own case successfully. "Arguments", in this particular reading, mean reasons why he had not sinned against God.

Job 23:5 "I would know the words [which] he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me."

Being a God, hearing and answering prayer, who always hears; and sooner or later answers the petitions of his people in his own way. And which when he does, they know, take notice, and observe it. Or then he should know the reason why the Lord contended with him, and what were his sins and transgressions, which were the cause of his afflictions. Things he had desired to know, but as yet had no answer (see Job 10:2).

"And understand what he would say unto me": What judgment he would pass upon him, what sentence he would pronounce on him, whether guilty or not, and by which judgment he was content to stand or fall. As for men's judgment, the judgment of his friends, or to be judged by them, he required it not, as he did not understand upon what ground they went, or that it was a good one. But the judgment of God he should pay a deference to, as being always according to truth, and the reason of which, when he should have a hearing before him, and a decisive sentence by him, he should clearly perceive (see 1 Cor. 4:3).

Job knew that God would make it clear to Job in what he had failed God with, if he could only talk to Him. God does not speak in words that are not understood. Job knew it would be very clear.

Verses 6-7: “Plead”. Engage in court debate over evidence, witnesses, etc. Job knew God was not going to enter a contest with him to determine, as in a court case, who was right. But he wanted God to at least listen to him, so confident was he that he could make his case, and be delivered by his just Judge (compare 1:8; 2:3).

Job 23:6 "Will he plead against me with [his] great power? No; but he would put [strength] in me."

Eliphaz had bid Job to acquaint himself with God, and return unto Him (Job 22:23). Job says there is nothing he longs for more than to come into His presence.

God would not attack Job with His great power. His power would fill Job with strength to go on. Job had every confidence in God. He knew that God was full of forgiveness and love. He knew that God would understand his great love for Him.

Job 23:7 "There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge."

There, before his high tribunal (verse 3), the upright man might argue or reason with him, appealing from his justice to his mercy. From God the Judge to God the Savior, vindicating his integrity, acknowledging his transgressions, and pleading that they were sins of infirmity. And at last obtaining from God the acquittal anticipated in the second clause of the verse. In the absence of any revelation of an Advocate who will plead our cause before God for us, Job would seem to have been justified in expecting such a liberty of pleading his own cause as he here sets forth.

"So should I be delivered for ever from my Judge": The "Judge of all the earth" will certainly and necessarily "do right." Job's conscience testifies to his substantial integrity and uprightness (compare 1 John 3:21). He is therefore, confident that if he can once bring his cause to God's awareness, he will obtain acquittal and deliverance.

Oh, that we could all feel this confidence in standing before the Judge of all the world. We each will stand before Him on Judgement Day, and give an account of our lives on earth. Job wanted his judgement to come now, so that he might give an account of himself to God. Job knew that he could trust the Judge of all the world to do exactly what was right.

Verses 8-12: Even though Job couldn't sense God's presence, he believed He was present and affirmed his commitment to God's purpose in this test (verse 10), and his continued obedience to God's Word, which were the most important issues in his life (verses 11-12).

Job 23:8 "Behold, I go forward, but he [is] not [there]; and backward, but I cannot perceive him:"

I.e. towards the east, which in Scripture is accounted the forepart of the world, as the Hebrew name of it signifies. Because of the light of the sun, which arises there, and draws the eye of men towards it.

"He is not there": To wit, so as I would have him, as a judge to hear and determine my cause, of which he is here speaking. For otherwise he knew and believed that God was essentially present in all places.

"Backward": I.e. towards the west; so also the north is called the left hand, and the south the right hand (Job 23:9). Because so they all are to a man who looks towards the east. He names all the several parts of the world, to show his eager desire and restless endeavors to find out God, and to present himself before him.

Job went back to his original complaint here. He said, "I seek God, but He is nowhere to be found". He had never left Job as He never leaves us, but it was difficult for Job to comprehend why God was allowing this trouble to overtake him. Job had chosen to walk in the Light of God. Satan had brought this darkness, to see if Job would remain faithful to God in the very worst of circumstances.

Job 23:9 "On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold [him]: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see [him]:"

To wit, in a special and peculiar manner, more than in other parts of the world. For so indeed God did work in those parts which were northward from Job, because there mankind (among whom God delights to be and to work) were most numerous, and most ingenious to discern God's works. There also was the seat of the Assyrian empire, which was eminent in Job's time, and afterwards of the other successive empires. In and by all which God did many great and glorious works. But this Hebrew word is by others, and that very properly and fitly, rendered when, or whilst, he worked, to wit, in an eminent manner. So, this is added to aggravate Job's unhappiness.

"He hideth himself": To wit, from me. He withdraws his favor, and will not afford me his presence and audience.

"I cannot see him": either I cannot discern his counsels and ways, and the reasons of his severe dealings with me. Or rather, he does not appear to me as a judge, to examine my cause and arguments, but condemns me without hearing me.

Job had never experienced a time when he could not reach out and touch God. It was almost as if God was hiding from him. We must continue to remember that Job was not aware that these trials had been brought by Satan by permission of God. If Job did not falter, this would be a witness to all of the angels in heaven, to Job's friends and relatives, and to every believer since that time.

Job 23:10 "But he knoweth the way that I take: [when] he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Job's language for testing is that of a furnace, which refines "gold" and makes it purer and brighter. This is a common image for God's purifying ministry in the lives of His people (Deut. 4:20; Psalm 66:10; Isa. 48:1; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

"I shall come forth as gold": His friends maintained that Job was full of dross, but Job is confident that no dross, or sin, would be revealed in the fires of refinement.

Job was aware this was some sort of test or trial in his life. The statement "when he hath tried me" leaves no doubt that Job had become aware this was a trial. Though Job was put in the fire of problems, these problems will only make him come to the top as pure gold. Job said, God knows me and knows I will come through this without sinning.

Job 23:11 "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined."

Or, held fast to His steps, i.e., followed closely His footsteps (compare Isa. 2:3).

"His way have I kept": The way he prescribed him, and directed him to walk in, the way of his commandments, which he observed constantly and kept. Though not perfectly, yet with great delight and pleasure, and so as not to be chargeable with any gross neglect of them, but in some sense to walk in all of them blameless as not to be culpable before men.

"And not declined": From the way of God, did not turn aside from it to the right or left. Or go into crooked paths with wicked men, or wickedly depart from his God, his ways and worship, as David says (Psalm 18:21).

Job was expressing the fact that he had walked on the straight and narrow path. He had not wandered into the wide path that leads to destruction. Christians, we must look for the footprints that Jesus made on this earth, and we must step into those tracks, and make them deeper with every step we take. Jesus is our example. We must follow him. A Christian is a believer in and a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Job 23:12 "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary [food]."

Not turned aside to any crooked or sinful path or course of life, human infirmity excepted.

"I have esteemed": Hebrew: I have hid, or laid it up, as men do their best treasures, or what they most love and value. The phrase notes a high estimation of it, a hearty affection to it, and a diligent care to preserve it.

"My necessary food": Or my appointed food, or my daily portion. I.e. that food or provision which is necessary for the support of my life, as this word is used (Gen. 47:22; Prov. 30:8; 31:15), which is more prized and desired than all the riches in the world.

Job had fed upon every Word of God. He had based everything he believed on the Word of God. He did not regard physical food as much as He did the Word of God. That was obvious, because he began to fast when the problem he now had, had started.

Verses 13-17: Understandably, Job considered a sovereign God unpredictable, which can be a fearful thing. In reality, God's seeming unpredictability is balanced by His unchanging faithfulness to His children.

Job 23:13 "But he [is] in one [mind], and who can turn him? And [what] his soul desireth, even [that] he doeth."

The word mind is not in the Hebrew, which is beehad, he is in one, namely, in one way or purpose or counsel. Notwithstanding all these evidences of my sincere piety, and all my prayers to him, he still continues in the same course of afflicting me.

"And who can turn him?" No man can change his counsels or course of acting. He is most absolute and free to do what he pleases, and he deals with me accordingly, and not by those milder methods which he uses toward other men.

"What his soul desireth, even that he doth": He will not do what I please or desire, but only what he pleases.

Job knew that the moment God spoke, it was absolute truth and could not be changed. Job knew that there was no changing in the LORD. This sounded like a complaint to God, that he would not consider what Job had to say.

Job 23:14 "For he performeth [the thing that is] appointed for me: and many such [things are] with him."

"He performeth the thing that is appointed for me": Job's resignation to God's sovereignty faltered at times in practice but he returned to it repeatedly. It is the great lesson of the book: Trust our sovereign God when you can't understand why things go badly in life.

This was as if Job was saying that his fate was predestined of God, and there was no use trying to change it. He had come to the sad conclusion that what was happening to him, was his fate in life.

Job 23:15 "Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him."

The thought of these further afflictions troubles me, and makes me shrink from his unseen presence. I know not how soon he may lay a fresh burden upon me.

"When I consider, I am afraid of him": When I reflect on the many forms of suffering which I may still have to undergo, my fears increase, I tremble at the future.

Fear of the Lord that brings reverence is a good thing. Terror of the Lord, which means we do not trust His actions toward us, is not a good thing. Faith and fear are opposites. Job was saying that he does not understand God's actions, and therefore, was afraid of Him.

Job 23:16 "For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me:"

Of faint (as in Lev. 26:36; Deut. 20:3). He takes away my courage, and leaves me a prey to terror.

"And the Almighty troubleth me": The verb used is a very strong one, and means "hath filled me with horror and consternation?"

This was just saying that Job had lost his assurance that all was well with him and God. Job was no longer feeling that he could come boldly before the LORD. He had lost his boldness. Job's heart was weak, and he was frightened of the Almighty, not knowing what He might do.

Job 23:17 "Because I was not cut off before the darkness, [neither] hath he covered the darkness from my face."

Job complains of two things:

- (1) That he was not cut off (i.e. removed from earth), before the great darkness fell upon his life (compare Job 3:11-13); and
- (2) That he was not "covered, i.e., sheltered and protected, by the love and care of God when the dark days came.

Job was complaining that God had not removed him from the earth, before the darkness fell. We hear this many times from a parent, when their child dies before them. They say, why did I not die instead? His other complaint was that the Light of God had not protected him from this horrible darkness that Satan had brought to him.

Job Chapter 23 Questions

1. What did Job say in verse 2?
2. Why was Job's complaint bitter?
3. Who did it appear Job was seeking?
4. If he had been able to find Him, the trial would not have been _____.
5. What was Job sure would happen if he could get an audience with God?
6. What was "arguments", in verse 4, speaking of?
7. What was Job assured he would understand, if he could hear from God?
8. In verse 6, God, would _____ Job.
9. What does the author wish that we would have when we stand before our Judge?
10. Why did Job want his judgement to come now?
11. What was Job's original complaint?
12. What was difficult for Job to comprehend?
13. What must we continue to remember in these lessons about Job?

14. Why did Job believe he could not reach out and touch God?
15. If Job did not falter, who would it witness to?
16. Job believed when God tried him, he would come out as _____.
17. Job had walked on the _____ and _____ path.
18. Where must Christians walk?
19. A Christian is a _____ in and a _____ of Jesus Christ.
20. How do we know that Job thought more of the Word of God, than he did physical food?
21. In verse 14, it was as if Job was saying what?
22. Job was troubled at God's _____.
23. What was verse 16 saying?
24. What were Job's two complaints in verse 17?