



Job - Chapter Sixteen

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

II.b Job 4:1-25:6 - The Friends and Job: Can Job be Right Before God? (continues)

II.b.ii Job 15:1-21:34 - The Second Cycle (continues)

Summary of Chapter Sixteen

Job replies to Eliphaz and through him to all three friends, who, instead of comforting him, had added to his misfortunes; and shows that, had they been in his circumstances, he would have treated them in a different manner (vv.1-5). Job then enters into an affecting detail of his suffering (vv.6-16), consoles himself with the consciousness of his own innocence, of which he takes God to witness, and patiently expects a termination of all his sufferings by death (vv.17-22).

II.b.ii.2 Job 16:1-17:16 - Job: Hope for a Sufferer

Job begins by pointing out that his friends have failed as comforters (16:2-5), even though comfort was their original purpose for coming to him; refer to Job 2:11. He then describes the seeming paradox of his situation: God is the one who has brought these things upon him and, although others take this as a sign of his judgement, Job trusts that God can testify on his behalf (16:6-17:9). In the final section Job presents his friends with the consequential dilemma of their words: their condemnation leaves death as Job's only hope. However, to long for death is to give up on any possibility of vindication and is no hope at all (17:10-16).

II.b.ii.2.A Job 16:1-22 - Job Reaffirms His Innocence

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Then Job answered:

² ‘I have heard many such things;
miserable comforters are you all.

³ Have windy words no limit?
Or what provokes you that you keep on talking?

⁴ I also could talk as you do,
if you were in my place;
I could join words together against you,
and shake my head at you.

⁵ I could encourage you with my mouth,
and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.

Job 16:1-5

I have heard many such things. Job reminded his critics that all they gave him was the ‘conventional wisdom’ explanation of an absolute relationship of cause and effect to make sense of his suffering. Job’s friends said, “Everyone knows these things” (as in Job 15:14-15); Job’s response was, “It is all what we have heard before; I have heard many such things.”

Miserable comforters are you all. Job hoped this reproach would shame his accusers into seeing just how greatly they failed to help Job, just as they did David: <<*Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none*>> (Psalm 69:20). Their overconfidence in their own wisdom made them unable to properly sympathise with Job. They did much better in the days when they simply sat silently in support of the suffering Job; refer to Job 2:11-13.

Have windy words no limit? Job just wanted his friends to stop their windy speeches, which were full of condemnation. It seems that this part of Job’s trial was as severe as the losses described in Job 1:1-22 and 2:1-13. One of the main reasons for being suspicious of the theology of Job’s friends is that it is so obviously lacking in the love and mercy that one might expect in such situations.

I also could talk as you do, if you were in my place. Job is not suggesting that he would act like his friends if the roles were reversed. He is trying to get his friends to put themselves in his place so that they will see how little comfort they are offering. Job recognised that he could indeed be in the same place of unsympathetic condemnation towards his friends as they were towards him. Yet he

also saw that his suffering had changed his perspective and would now instead strengthen and comfort them.

I could join words together against you, and shake my head at you. These would be insults and a sign of derision, both often seen in Scripture: <<*This is the word that the Lord has spoken concerning him: She despises you, she scorns you – virgin daughter Zion; she tosses her head – behind your back, daughter Jerusalem*>> (2 Kings 19:21 and Isaiah 37:22), <<*All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads*>> (Psalm 22:7), <<*Israel was a laughing-stock for you, though he was not caught among thieves; but whenever you spoke of him you shook your head!*>> (Jeremiah 48:27), <<*All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at daughter Jerusalem; ‘Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?’*>> (Lamentations 2:15), <<*Is this the exultant city that lived secure, that said to itself, ‘I am, and there is no one else’? What a desolation it has become, a lair for wild animals! Everyone who passes by it hisses and shakes the fist*>> (Zephaniah 2:15), and: <<*Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross’*>> (Matthew 27:39-40).

I could encourage you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain. One of the great advantages of personal suffering is that it makes the sufferer far more sympathetic towards others who suffer. Those who otherwise would have been harsh and strict towards those suffering will often find themselves much more willing to give strength and comfort towards others who suffer similar grief. However, the sufferer is not necessarily comforted even by such kind words as seen in the case of Jacob at the loss of his son Joseph: <<*All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, ‘No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.’ Thus his father bewailed him*>> (Genesis 37:35).

- ⁶ ‘If I speak, my pain is not assuaged,
and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me?
- ⁷ Surely now God has worn me out;
he has made desolate all my company.
- ⁸ And he has shrivelled me up,
which is a witness against me;
my leanness has risen up against me,
and it testifies to my face.

Job 16:6-8

If I speak, my pain is not assuaged, and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me?

Job felt trapped by both options. If he speaks, he finds no relief from his unsympathetic friends; yet silence does nothing to ease his grief.

Surely now God has worn me out. Job here seemed close to surrender to God; to simply acknowledge that in his struggle with God, God had indeed won. God had stripped everything away from Job and exhausted him. Job's exhausted condition was a witness against him. To counter Eliphaz's description of the fat, wicked person in Job 15:27, Job points to his own shrivelled and emaciated state. It witnesses or testifies that God's hand is against him: <<*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror*>> (Psalm 6:2), and: <<*I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me*>> (Psalm 22:17); also linking the motif of hostile stares (v.10), but not that he is guilty (v.17).

He has made desolate all my company either refers to the loss of Job's family as described in Job 1:1-22 or in the desolate manner of Job's unhelpful companions.

- ⁹ He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me;
he has gnashed his teeth at me;
my adversary sharpens his eyes against me.
- ¹⁰ They have gaped at me with their mouths;
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;
they mass themselves together against me.
- ¹¹ God gives me up to the ungodly,
and casts me into the hands of the wicked.
- ¹² I was at ease, and he broke me in two;
he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;
- ¹³ his archers surround me.
He slashes open my kidneys, and shows no mercy;
he pours out my gall on the ground.
- ¹⁴ He bursts upon me again and again;
he rushes at me like a warrior.

Job 16:9-14

He has torn me in his wrath, and hated me; he has gnashed his teeth at me; my adversary sharpens his eyes against me. Job felt he was in a supreme conflict; not with his friends, not with his circumstances, but with his God - or at least with his prior conception of God and how God worked things. His crisis threw all that prior conception into uncertainty and he now felt that he was under attack from God. Some commentators, such as Adam Clarke, believe that the He of v.9 is Satan and not God. In other places such tearing is attributed to the Lord: <<*If he tears down, no one can rebuild; if he shuts someone in, no one can open up*>> (Job 12:14), and: <<*Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up*>> (Hosea 6:1).

It seems that Job here wrestled with God just as intensely as Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord in Genesis 32:22-32. The similarity of the struggle is instructive given the difference in their character. Jacob wrestled with God as a carnal man who needed to be conquered. Job struggled with God as a godly man also needed to be conquered or at least conquered even more than he already was.

They have struck me insolently on the cheek. In ancient culture and indeed into modern times such a strike was seen as a great insult and often led to a similar response: <<*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting*>> (Isaiah 50:6), <<*to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults*>> (Lamentations 3:30), <<*Now you are walled around with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek*>> (Micah 5:1), <<*When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?'*>> (John 18:22), and: <<*Then the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near him to strike him on the mouth*>> (Acts 23:2). Jesus calls on his followers not to respond in like manner but instead: <<*If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt*>> (Luke 6:29).

They mass themselves together against me. Part of Job's agony was related to the idea that this entire struggle was so public, acted out in front of the audience of his friends and onlookers. At least Jacob's struggle with God was private; the public nature of Job's crisis made him feel that his friends were on God's side against him in some way, or used by God as another way to deepen his crisis, i.e. God gives me up to the ungodly. In recalling the attacks of the ungodly, Job remembered the cruel attacks of the Chaldeans and Sabæans that came upon his servants and livestock, as recorded in the first chapter.

I was at ease, and he broke me in two; he seized me by the neck and dashed me to pieces. Job uses the imagery of warfare and what happens to a city and its inhabitants when it is attacked or breached to express how he feels broken open by God. Some commentators believe there is a sense in which Job is a prophetic picture of Jesus Christ, the righteous one on the Cross who nevertheless became a target of God's righteous wrath; not because he deserved it but because it was in the good and greater plan of God to do so.

- 15 I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin,
and have laid my strength in the dust.
- 16 My face is red with weeping,
and deep darkness is on my eyelids,
- 17 though there is no violence in my hands,
and my prayer is pure.

Job 16:15-17

I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin. Job's constant grief is like a coarse cloth stitched to his skin, a reality of acute and unending pain.

And have laid my strength in the dust is literally 'buried my horn in the ground.' The horn of an animal represents strength, power, and nobility. Every semblance of dignity and worth has been taken away from Job.

Deep darkness is literally 'shadow of death.' Job's gaunt eyes are those of a dying man. It is a term used ten times in the Book of Job and is frequently used for an evil way of life: <<*The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what they stumble over*>> (Proverbs 4:19), a way of life without the Messiah: <<*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined*>> (Isaiah 9:2), and: <<*The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name*>> (Amos 5:8), or a place where people and fallen angels are kept for the day of judgement: <<*For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgement*>> (2 Peter 2:4), <<*And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgement of the great day*>> (Jude 6).

Though there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure. Job simply could not reconcile his previous righteous and pious life with his present

desolation. Why would God attack (as described in vv.12-14) such a righteous and pious man?

- 18 'O earth, do not cover my blood;
let my outcry find no resting-place.
- 19 Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.
- 20 My friends scorn me;
my eye pours out tears to God,
- 21 that he would maintain the right of a mortal with God,
as one does for a neighbour.
- 22 For when a few years have come,
I shall go the way from which I shall not return.

Job 16:18-22

O earth, do not cover my blood. Job here begged the creation to not erase his life. If he were to die in his crises, Job at least wanted his blood to remain evident as a testimony to his life.

Who is Job's witness in heaven who vouches for Job and who testifies on his behalf? Is it one of the 'holy ones,' derided by Eliphaz in Job 5:1? Job's tentative plea for an 'arbiter' in Job 9:33 grows in confidence here with the knowledge that God alone is the source of his suffering. So too will his realisation grow that God alone is his hope for vindication. This may not be clear to Job yet thus v.21 distinguishes the 'witness' from God, but it will be so eventually: <<***For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth***>> (Job 19:25).

My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God. In one poetic and powerful sentence, Job described his present agony. He was sometimes confident in his future and ultimate vindication, yet he also lived in the agony of his moment.

That he would maintain the right of a mortal with God, as one does for a neighbour. Job here recognised that what he needed was a true advocate in heaven; someone to plead his case before God. Job anticipated the need that would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is both mediator: <<***For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all – this was attested at the right time***>> (1 Timothy 2:5-6), and advocate: <<***My little children, I am writing these***>>

things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous>> (1 John 2:1) in heaven before God the Father.

Job knew that he needed a mediator, someone who would bridge the gap between himself and a great and holy God. Job also knew by faith that such a God existed and could be trusted. This made Job a believer in Jesus before Jesus ever walked the earth; he had faith in God's Messiah that was yet to come before any prophets foretold of his coming. This is a reminder that although the comfort of faith in God's unseen hand and plan was available to Job, it is even more available to people now in light of the finished work of Jesus Christ and his exaltation to the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

For when a few years have come, I shall go the way from which I shall not return. Job would not live long enough to see his longing fulfilled in Jesus Christ, yet he would be eventually comforted by the anticipation of that fulfilment.