



Job - Chapter Seventeen

- 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? \(continues\)](#)
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Summary of Chapter Seventeen

Job complains of the injustice of his friends and compares his present state of want and woe with his former honour and affluence (vv.1-6). God's dealings with him will forever astonish upright people; yet the righteous shall not be discouraged but hold on to his way (vv.7-9). Job finally asserts that there is not a single wise man among his friends and that he has no expectation except for a speedy death (vv.10-16).

II.b.ii.2.B Job 17:1-16 - Job Prays for Relief

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- ¹ My spirit is broken, my days are extinct,
the grave is ready for me.
- ² Surely there are mockers around me,
and my eye dwells on their provocation.

Job 17:1-2

My spirit is broken, my days are extinct. Job continued his same sense of defeat and brokenness as described in the previous chapter. His theme is also picked up later by David: <<*Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled*>> (Psalm 143:4), and then by the prophet: <<*My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd's tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end*>> (Isaiah 38:12).

Surely there are mockers around me. The lack of sympathy and help from Job's friends - that they started out as sympathetic sufferers as in Job 2:11-13 but became mockers when Job did not respond to their wisdom as they thought he should - was an especially painful aspect of his crisis: <<*I have become the laughing-stock of all my people, the object of their taunt-songs all day long*>> (Lamentations 3:14).

- 3 'Lay down a pledge for me with yourself;
who is there that will give surety for me?
- 4 Since you have closed their minds to understanding,
therefore you will not let them triumph.
- 5 Those who denounce friends for reward —
the eyes of their children will fail.

Job 17:3-5

Who is there that will give surety for me? Job felt - rightly so, according to his circumstances - that heaven was against him. Here he pleads for an agreement of peace between himself and heaven.

The NIV translation of Job 17:3 is helpful: <<*Give me, O God, the pledge you demand. Who else will put up security for me?*>>. The idea is that Job cried out to God and said, "You will have to set this right God; it is beyond me to do it." This is especially meaningful in light of the main idea of Job's friends, that it was his responsibility to repent and set things right between himself and God. In a small way, Job grasped the whole tone of salvation under the New Covenant: God has made the atonement and the reconciliation; believers do not have to do it themselves.

Since you have closed their minds to understanding. Job understood that if God had wanted to inform the hearts of Job's friends, he was fully capable of doing so. Ultimately, even the unsympathetic manner of his friends was an aspect of Job's crisis allowed by God.

Therefore you will not let them triumph. At the same time, Job's friends were accountable for their lack of understanding. God's withholding of understanding from them was an evidence of his displeasure towards them.

Those who denounce friends for reward – the eyes of their children will fail. Since vv.1-4 are likely addressed to God (vv.3-4 directly), in v.5 Job may be asking God to remember what his friends have done, warning the friends of the consequences of such actions, or both. Many interpreters think that v.5 quotes a proverb of the day, which if true bears a message similar to other warnings in the OT against being a false witness: <<*If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst*>> (Deuteronomy 19:18b-19), <<*A false witness will not go unpunished, and a liar will not escape*>> (Proverbs 19:5), and: <<*A false witness will not go unpunished, and the liar will perish*>> (Proverbs 19:9).

- ⁶ 'He has made me a byword of the peoples,
and I am one before whom people spit.
- ⁷ My eye has grown dim from grief,
and all my members are like a shadow.
- ⁸ The upright are appalled at this,
and the innocent stir themselves up against the godless.
- ⁹ Yet the righteous hold to their way,
and they that have clean hands grow stronger and stronger.

Job 17:6-9

He has made me a byword of the peoples, and I am one before whom people spit. Job here spoke with poetic power of his own humiliation and how greatly he had been humbled. It is a reminder of the universal principle of the humiliation of man. Job's own humiliation was so complete that he could say, "Upright men are astonished at this." Onlookers found it hard to believe that this righteous man had been so seriously afflicted.

Human humiliation is inevitable. The frailty of humanity and the fallen nature of this world combine together to make the humiliation of man certain, yet it may come in many forms. Human humiliation may come to them through their own sin, through their own weaknesses, through circumstances beyond their control, or by what others put upon them. Thankfully, the humiliation of humanity has its model and sympathy in the life of Jesus. He climbed the ladder down from heaven's glory to the lowest of human experience

(Philippians 2:5-8) to give both meaning and dignity to the humiliation of man. Christians are also thankful that humiliation serves as a gateway to grace. The principle stands true - God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble: <<*But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (James 4:6), and: <<*In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (1 Peter 5:5). Both James and Peter are quoting Proverbs 3:34.

He has made me a byword of the peoples. Although Job recognised his own humiliation, he also proclaimed the sovereignty of God. He did not find the cause of his crisis in blind fate or even human cruelty. He understood that if he was indeed a byword of the people and a man in whose face men spit, it was because God had made him so.

Job and his friends did not agree on much but they did agree on this. They disagreed on the reasons why God had made him so but all saw the sovereign and great hand of God behind it. Understanding this can help believers today - although it was obviously difficult for Job and for them in similar circumstances - that God has a good and loving plan even in allowing such humiliation. Job indeed became a byword of the people, "My afflictions and calamities have become a subject of general conversation, so that my poverty and affliction are proverbial." 'As poor as Job' and 'As afflicted as Job' are proverbs that have even reached modern times and are still in use even outside of the church.

All my members are like a shadow. Job's entire body is exhausted from grief and pain; this summarises his theme from Job 16:7-16.

Yet the righteous hold to their way, and they that have clean hands grow stronger and stronger. In this section Job added a final, emphatic point, declaring the victory of the righteous: <<*But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day*>> (Proverbs 4:18). Even in his crisis he had flashes of faith that lit up the night of his misery. This victory comes in endurance as the righteous will hold to his way. Job would himself experience this victory as he endured through his severe and long season of crisis. This victory comes in progression, as he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger. Job's situation did not get better in an instant. There were flashes of inspiration and clarity but overall God brought him through the crisis in a prolonged experience. In several of these verses Job is supposed to speak prophetically of his future restoration and of the good which religious society should derive from the history of his original affluence, consequent poverty and affliction, and final restoration to health, peace, and prosperity.

Introduction to Job 17:10-16

In both lines of v.12, Job appears to refer to the perspective of his friends: they argue that if he will simply repent, God will restore him and turn his night into day; refer to Job 5:17-27, 8:5-7 and 11:13-20. However, Job argues that simply accepting the perspective of his friends would be to make his bed in darkness (v.13) because it would be a response void of the faith that trusts that God is both sovereign and just (and thus knows the truth) and of the hope that he will be vindicated by God (v.15). Throughout the dialogue in Chapters 3-31, Job is essentially arguing God's character back to God from the belief that he is just. In so doing, Job the sufferer is structuring his lament as ultimately a posture of hope.

- 10 But you, come back now, all of you,
and I shall not find a sensible person among you.
- 11 My days are past, my plans are broken off,
the desires of my heart.
- 12 They make night into day;
“The light”, they say, “is near to the darkness.”
- 13 If I look for Sheol as my house,
if I spread my couch in darkness,
- 14 if I say to the Pit, “You are my father”,
and to the worm, “My mother”, or “My sister”,
- 15 where then is my hope?
Who will see my hope?
- 16 Will it go down to the bars of Sheol?
Shall we descend together into the dust?’

Job 17:10-16

I shall not find a sensible person among you. Job here threw down the rhetorical challenge to his friends once more, insulting them as they had insulted him.

My days are past, my plans are broken off. Job accepted now that his good years and strong years were behind him, and anticipated not the quick death he once longed for but perhaps a progressive loss of strength and ability until he simply perished: <<*Where then is my hope? Who will see my hope?*>> (Job 17:15), and: <<*I said: In the noontide of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years*>> (Isaiah 38:10).

They make night into day; “The light”, they say, “is near to the darkness.” Job thought of his approaching death and took comfort in it. It would transform his current night into day. The corruption of the grave would be as close to him as a family member.

Where then is my hope? At the same time this comfort did not sit well with Job. He recognised that it was a slender and frail hope to trust in the grave; he could not be confident that hope would follow him down to Sheol and give him rest. Job therefore concludes this speech with a conflicted hope; wishing for death but not being satisfied or confident in that hope. What he really wanted was a resolution from God but seems to have given up hope for that: <<*so I say, ‘Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord’*>> (Lamentations 3:18), and: <<*Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely”*>> (Ezekiel 37:11).

The bars of Sheol. Hebrew *baddey*, translated as bars, signifies also branches, distended limbs or claws, and may here refer either to a personification of the grave, a monster who seizes on human bodies and keeps them fast in his deadly gripe; or to the different branching off alleys in subterranean cemeteries or catacombs in which niches are made for the reception of different bodies.