



Job - Chapter Nineteen

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 Nineteen

Job begins by asking his friends how long they will persist in accusing him and why they feel no shame for the manner in which they have done so. Even if he has done wrong, Job maintains that it is God who has brought about his circumstances (vv.2-6). Job laments that although he cries out for justice, his continued suffering has brought only isolation and indifference from his family and friends (vv.7-22). Job concludes with the wish that his belief in God's vindication of him would be inscribed in rock as a permanent witness (vv.23-27) and with a warning to his friends against continuing to pursue him with such anger and certainty that they are right, lest they fall under the very sort of judgement they assume has fallen upon Job (vv.28-29).

II.b.ii.4 Job 19:1-29 - Job Replies: I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Then Job answered:

² 'How long will you torment me,
and break me in pieces with words?

³ These ten times you have cast reproach upon me;
are you not ashamed to wrong me?

- 4 And even if it is true that I have erred,
my error remains with me.
- 5 If indeed you magnify yourselves against me,
and make my humiliation an argument against me,
- 6 know then that God has put me in the wrong,
and closed his net around me.

Job 19:1-6

How long will you torment me, and break me in pieces with words? Job opens by echoing the question from the first line of each of Bildad's speeches in Job 8:2 and 18:2 to draw attention to how relentless his friends have been in condemning him. Charles Spurgeon comments, "They struck at him with their hard words, as if they were breaking stones on the roadside. We ought to be very careful what we say to those who are suffering affliction and trial, for a word, though it seems to be a very little thing, will often cut far more deeply and wound far more terribly than a razor would."

Job uses the phrase 'ten times' as a figure of speech indicating a full measure rather than ten actual interchanges as also seen in: <<*yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me*>> (Genesis 31:7), <<*These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you for fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times*>> (Genesis 31:41), and: <<*none of the people who have seen my glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested me these ten times and have not obeyed my voice*>> (Numbers 14:22).

And even if it is true that I have erred, my error remains with me. Job was steadfast in his refusal to agree with his friends that he had caused his crisis by some remarkable sin and refusal to repent.

Know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net around me. Job insisted to his friends that he was not a guilty victim before a righteous God. If God had sent or allowed this calamity in Job's life, it could be said that God had wronged Job because the calamity was not a just penalty for some sin in Job. And of course, allowing for the emotional aspect of this pained outpouring, the reader might understand how Job would say, "Know then that God has put me in the wrong." He had reason to think this and poured out his honest feelings before God and his friends.

The verb translated 'put me in the wrong' is the same verb that Bildad used in Job 8:3 translated there as pervert. Job uses this verb to make his point clear:

even in the very protesting of his innocence, Job is affirming his belief that God is just, but he also continues to affirm that his suffering is not because of his sin and that God is the one who has ultimately allowed or brought it about.

7 Even when I cry out, “Violence!” I am not answered;
I call aloud, but there is no justice.

8 He has walled up my way so that I cannot pass,
and he has set darkness upon my paths.

9 He has stripped my glory from me,
and taken the crown from my head.

10 He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone,
he has uprooted my hope like a tree.

11 He has kindled his wrath against me,
and counts me as his adversary.

12 His troops come on together;
they have thrown up siege-works against me,
and encamp around my tent.

Job 19:7-12

I cry out, “Violence!” Job here complained at what was the core of his crisis. Job was accustomed to finding comfort and some sense of an answer from God in his previous trials. Yet now when he cried out to heaven he heard no reply. The prophet Habakkuk opens his oracle with a similar statement and complaint before God: *<<O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous – therefore judgement comes forth perverted>>* (Habakkuk 1:2-4).

He has walled up my way. God’s fence had at first kept trouble away from Job: *<<Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land>>* (Job 1:10), but now it was a wall that gave Job no way of escape: *<<Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in?>>* (Job 3:23). The very scale of his suffering is, for Job, a sign of its divine origin.

Other Scriptures give a similar impression: <<*He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me*>> (Lamentations 3:7), and: <<*Therefore I will hedge her way with thorns; and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths*>> (Hosea 2:6).

He has stripped my glory from me. With a deeply moving poetic style, Job described how he felt God had brought him low. He was like a king uncrowned, like a house with its walls broken down, and like an uprooted tree.

He has kindled his wrath against me, and counts me as his adversary. Although Job could not comprehend it nor be expected to, God still held him in special favour and care. God put Job into a place where he was expected to believe despite what seemed to be irrefutable circumstances and personal feelings.

They have thrown up siege-works against me, and encamp around my tent. In vv.8-12 Job recounts the reverse progression of an ancient siege and conquering of a city; yet the irony was that Job was not like a mighty city, but only like a humble tent. The reverse progress starts at v.8:

- Captivity (I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths).
- Dethronement (taken the crown from my head).
- Being like a wall torn down (he breaks me down on every side).
- Being like an uprooted tree (he has uprooted my hope like a tree).
- Having a siege set against him (they have thrown up siege-works against me).
- Being surrounded (they encamp around my tent).

Introduction to Job 19:13-20

Viewed apart from Job's suffering, these verses are a remarkable register of the social world of the ancient Israelite patriarch. Within Job's anguished state, he takes a complete inventory of his social isolation. An explicit link is also forged between the poetic dialogue and the story told in the prose frame, as confirmed by v.14 and: <<*Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring*>> (Job 42:11).

- 13 'He has put my family far from me,
and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me.
- 14 My relatives and my close friends have failed me;
- 15 the guests in my house have forgotten me;
my serving-girls count me as a stranger;

I have become an alien in their eyes.
16 I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer;
I must myself plead with him.
17 My breath is repulsive to my wife;
I am loathsome to my own family.
18 Even young children despise me;
when I rise, they talk against me.
19 All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have turned against me.
20 My bones cling to my skin and to my flesh,
and I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

Job 19:13-20

He has put my family far from me. Job's family were now dead and are beyond his reach. However, the Hebrew term translated family is also translated as brothers. It seems that Job may have meant his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. He had once regarded them as close brothers or family but now felt they had forsaken him and turned against him, therefore were far from him.

My serving-girls count me as a stranger. It is no surprise that Job had servants, a word also translated as slaves, who would have undertaken a variety of tasks within his estate. It was the cultural norm for people in his position: *<<I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem>>* (Ecclesiastes 2:7). Whereas they were once respectful of their employer/owner, now they rejected him.

I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer. Before his crisis Job was a wealthy and influential man. Yet now even his own servants did not obey or respect him.

My breath is repulsive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family. Job was in such a miserable state both physically and spiritually, that his wife wanted nothing to do with him, as seen by her comments in Job 2:9.

Even young children despise me. Although some commentators believe Job is referring to either grandchildren or those who were symbolically Job's children, it is clear that they were not Job's own children since all ten were killed in a tragic accident (Job 1:2 and 1:18-19). Yet Adam Clarke had another suggestion: "But the

mention of his children in this place may intimate that he had still some remaining; that there might have been young ones, who, not being of a proper age to attend the festival of their elder brothers and sisters, escaped that sad catastrophe.” Some suggest that it may also be that Job had in mind that his children cursed or rejected him from the world beyond; he felt that from their place in the after-life they regarded him as repulsive. However, it is most likely that Job is simply referring to the children from his community who would normally be respectful of their elders, especially a man in Job’s former position, but that now they have no respect and even taunt him because of his demise.

All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me. This was a bitter pill for Job to swallow and yet it is seen again when some of Jesus’ disciples abandon him: <<*Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him*>> (John 6:66), and one even closer to him betrayed him: <<*I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, “The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me”*>> (John 13:18).

Although ‘**by the skin of my teeth**’ has become an idiomatic expression in English for just barely accomplishing or avoiding something, the intended referent of the Hebrew phrase is not so clear, i.e. what is meant by the ‘skin’ of the teeth is difficult to determine. However, the general sense of the English phrase, which has typically been explained as having its origins from this verse in Job, fits the context well: Job’s body bears the effects of both his emotional and physical suffering and gives witness to the fact that he has narrowly **escaped** his own death.

- 21 Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
- 22 Why do you, like God, pursue me,
never satisfied with my flesh?

Job 19:21-22

Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends. In light of the eloquence and truth of his previous complaint, Job called upon his friends to therefore **pity** him. Instead of joining against him in a concert of condemnation they should have had **pity** on this one so afflicted by **the hand of God**: <<*Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them to bring misfortune, as the Lord had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress*>> (Judges 2:15), and: <<*I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God’s wrath*>> (Lamentations 3:1).

Why do you, like God, pursue me, never satisfied with my flesh? If his friends were so convinced that Job had sinned and that his obvious physical suffering represented God's judgement, he asks them why they continue their relentless pursuit of him. From Job's perspective, his friends have chosen to use whatever he has left as means to torment him (refer to v.2), and he is pleading that they might show him mercy.

23 'O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!
24 O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock for ever!

Job 19:23-24

Job wishes that his words could be recorded as a witness that would remain when he is dead. He refers to two methods of recording that were common in the ancient Near East:

- Inscribed in a book. This process could refer either to writing in a scroll or book or to an inscription on a clay tablet, all of which represent writing materials that would have been more or less portable.
- Engraved on a rock. Job also wishes that his words could be inscribed in a more public and permanent fashion. An example of this type of monument is preserved in the inscription of Darius I at Behistun, modern Bisitun in western Iran, on which the cuneiform signs were inlaid with lead in order to facilitate the reading of the inscription from the road below.

Although it is not commented on explicitly in the book itself, the writing of the Book of Job is in many respects a fulfilment of his wish in a way that both includes and extends beyond the purposes Job had in mind. If this was intended as a prayer to God then it was answered for Job's words have been recorded in this great book for the whole world to read and contemplate upon.

25 For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
26 and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
27 whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!

Job 19:25-27

For. Job is stating here the grounds for wishing that his words would be recorded (vv.23-24).

For I know. Job's certainty is impressive. This was something that he knew; it was much more than a hope and more than a guess. Job knew that he had a Redeemer; someone to rescue him from his crisis and despair and every accusation set against him. Verses 25-27 are so tightly knit that there should be no doubt that the Redeemer is God. This is confirmed in other Scriptures such as: <<***They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer***>> (Psalm 78:35), <<***Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth***>> (Isaiah 44:24), and: <<***Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name***>> (Jeremiah 50:34a).

I know that my Redeemer lives. This is another of the brilliant flashes of faith in Job's otherwise dark and bleak background of crisis and suffering. Job knew that his Redeemer was alive, and that because he lived he could also bring life to Job. Perhaps as he considered that future generations would indeed look at his life and words, it stirred him to a triumphant proclamation of faith. The Hebrew noun *go'el* translated Redeemer is the same word used frequently in the OT to refer to a kinsman-redeemer, who had both rights and responsibilities for vindicating a family member; refer to Ruth 4:1-6. In the OT, God says that he will redeem his people from slavery: <<***Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement***>> (Exodus 6:6), and is thus later referred to as the Redeemer of Israel in Isaiah 43:14 and 44:6. For God as a Redeemer of individuals refer to Genesis 48:16, Psalm 19:14, and the comments made on Psalm 25:22. Job's description of his Redeemer as one who lives and his following reference to God indicate he believes that God is the one who ultimately will vindicate him.

The meaning of the word *goel*, i.e. redeemer, is fundamental to understanding this passage. The word is important in OT jurisprudence. It had both a criminal and a civil aspect. As an avenger of blood, a *goel* had a right and the responsibility to avenge the blood of a slain kinsman; refer to Numbers 35:12-28. He was not seeking revenge but justice. On the civil side he was a redeemer or vindicator. Here he had the responsibility to 'buy back' and so redeem the lost inheritance of a deceased relative. As such he was the defender or champion of the oppressed. With this in mind, Spurgeon comments, "Christ's kinship with his people is to be thought of with great comfort because it is voluntary. We have some, perhaps, who are akin to us, yet, who wish they were not. Many a time, when a rich man has poor relations, he is half ashamed of the kinship between them, and wishes that it did not

exist. Shame upon him for thinking so! But our Lord Jesus Christ's relationship to us is no accident of birth; it was voluntarily assumed by him."

And that at the last he will stand upon the earth. This meant that Job knew his Redeemer was more than a spiritual concept; he was a living being who could stand one day on the earth. He knew his Redeemer would come to comfort and vindicate Job, although to this point Job had been conspicuously without evident comfort from God.

Job would not have known at this point that he was prophesying that God would one day walk upon the earth in human flesh and that at the end of all things he will return to set everything back to the way it was intended to be at creation. However, he did have faith that the Lord would redeem him somehow and in some way!

Then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side. Because of the content of Job's earlier laments and the difficulty of the Hebrew in v.26, interpreters have questioned the likelihood that Job is expressing in these verses a belief that God will redeem him after death. However, while the focus of Job's dialogue and lament is the desire that what he believes to be true in heaven, i.e. before God, would also be shown to be true on earth, such a desire makes sense only if it is grounded in a belief that God is his Redeemer and that he will vindicate Job even in death.

Charles Spurgeon again comments, "It has occurred to me that, possibly, Job himself may not have known the full meaning of all that he said. Imagine the patriarch driven into a corner, badgered by his so-called friends, charged by them with all manner of evils until he is quite boiling over with indignation, and, at the same time, smarting under terrible bodily diseases and the dreadful losses which he has sustained; and, at last, he bursts out with this exclamation, 'I shall be vindicated one day; I am sure I shall. I know that my Vindicator lives. I am sure that, there is One who will vindicate me; and if he never clears my name and reputation as long as I live, it will be done afterwards. There must be a just God, in heaven, who will see me righted; and even though worms devour my body until the last relic of it has passed away, I do verily believe that, somehow, in the far-off ages, I shall be vindicated.'"

Whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. This bold confidence of Job - although it shines as a flash of faith in a dark background of despair - completely routed Satan's confidence that Job could be turned against God. His confidence and trust, blind as it was at the moment, was set upon the fact that he would one day see God for himself, a statement powerfully and poetically repeated for emphasis.

Anticipating the fulfilment of all this, no wonder Job could say, "My heart faints within me!" With this wonderful revelation and proclamation of his anticipated

Redeemer, he clearly though probably unknowingly looked forward to Jesus Christ and his work as Redeemer.

Adam Clarke described how he felt this remarkable revelation given to Job changed him and gave him a different attitude that is evident in the rest of the Book of Job: “It is not at all probable that Job had this confidence any time before the moment in which he uttered it: it was then a direct revelation, nothing of which he ever had before, else he had never dropped those words of impatience and irritation which we find in several of his speeches. And this may be safely inferred from the consideration, that after this time no such words escaped his lips. He bears the rest of his sufferings with great patience and fortitude; and seems to look forward with steady hope to that day in which all tears shall be wiped away from off all faces, and it is fully proved that the Judge of all the earth has done right.” It has been said by some that this apparent glimpse of a Messiah yet to come changed Job and transformed him in the midst of his suffering.

- 28 If you say, “How we will persecute him!”
and, “The root of the matter is found in him”;
- 29 be afraid of the sword,
for wrath brings the punishment of the sword,
so that you may know there is a judgement.’

Job 19:28-29

Job tells his friends their certainty that the root of the matter is found in him has led them to pursue him in wrath. Job uses the image of the sword to refer to passing judgement and to warn the friends against their presumption that they can understand, and actually wield, the sword of judgement that belongs to God alone. In calling his friends to be careful how they judge him lest they fall under the punishment of the very sword they presume to wield, Job suggests something similar to what Jesus will teach explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount: <<***Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye***>> (Matthew 7:1-5).

Wrath brings the punishment of the sword. The wrath of the friends is a ‘crime of the sword,’ a sin deserving of punishment: <<***For that would be a heinous crime; that would be a criminal offence***>> (Job 31:11), and: <<***this also would***>>

be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I should have been false to God above>> (Job 31:28). False testimony demands the same penalty that would have been given the accused: *<<If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days, and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry. 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 19:16-19); the accusations of the friends were worthy of death.

Know there is a judgement. The Hebrew for this line is elliptical; it seems to mean either that there is a judge or that there is a judgement. The appearance of the Redeemer, says Job, would be bad news for his friends.

Job was not afraid of judgement because he was confident that the charges against him were false and that his Redeemer would vindicate him. However, there is a Redeemer who also clears Christians of their true guilt. As Spurgeon once said, “There is another most comforting thought, that our Vindicator will clear us from true charges as well as false ones. As for the false charges, what do they matter? It is the true ones that really concern us: can Christ clear us from them? Yes, that he can.”