



Job - Chapter Six

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.i Job 4:1-14:22 - The First Cycle (continues)

Summary of Chapter Six

Job answers Eliphaz and vindicates himself by showing that the great affliction which he has suffered was the cause of his complaining by which life was rendered so difficult for him to bear. He complains that, whereas he expected consolation and support from his friends, he had received nothing but the bitterest reproaches, on the assumed ground that he must be the cause of his affliction through sin, otherwise God would not be punishing him in this way.

Job's response claims that his friends knew nothing of his case and that they had no real compassion for his situation. He then challenges them to show clearly what his fault is so that he may rectify it.

II.b.i.2 Job 6:1-7:21 - Job: Life is Futile

In his first response, Job longs that his life would be cut off (6:9) so that he could rest from his suffering, knowing that he had not denied God (6:10). Job found his life unbearable on account of the empty comfort offered by his friends (6:14-30) and what he describes as the continued watchfulness of God (7:11-21). The speech as a whole shows a remarkable progression. Job moves from first person soliloquy in 6:2-13, continuing his introspective mode from Chapter 3, shifting to second person plural address to speak directly to the friends for the first time so as to question the nature of their comfort (6:14-30). Then Job relapses into first person reflection on the futility of his life (7:1-6), before a transitional movement (7:7-10) now in second person singular to Eliphaz himself. Finally, the pivotal verse Job 7:11 introduces Job's first direct address to God (7:12-21).

II.b.i.2.A Job 6:1-30 - Job Replies: My Complaint Is Just

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- 1 Then Job answered:
- 2 ‘O that my vexation were weighed,
and all my calamity laid in the balances!
- 3 For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea;
therefore my words have been rash.
- 4 For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;
my spirit drinks their poison;
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.
- 5 Does the wild ass bray over its grass,
or the ox low over its fodder?
- 6 Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt,
or is there any flavour in the juice of mallows?
- 7 My appetite refuses to touch them;
they are like food that is loathsome to me.

Job 6:1-7

Then Job answered. Job’s friends were kind enough to sit with him in sympathetic silence for some seven days; refer to Job 2:13. Job broke the silence with an anguished rant in Chapter 3, and Eliphaz responded with a poetic call to repentance in Chapters 4-5. Now Job will answer the words of Eliphaz.

O that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances!

Job’s first response to the words of Eliphaz were to complain about the greatness of his suffering because Eliphaz only made his suffering worse with his well-intentioned but incorrect analysis of Job’s problem. This was not only Job’s feeling; it was also the judgement of God as revealed at the end of the Book of Job, where he said of Eliphaz and Job’s other counsellors: *<<for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has>>* (Job 42:7b).

Later, Job will ask for fair judgement in accordance of what he has done, using a similar analogy: *<<let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!>>* (Job 31:6). This can be taken in light of the Lord’s values: *<<A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight>>* (Proverbs 11:1). Being weighed in this way forms part of the judgement against King Belshazzar of Babylon in the famous ‘writing on the

wall': <<*And this is the writing that was inscribed: mene, mene, tekel, and parsin. This is the interpretation of the matter: mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; tekel, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; peres, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians*>> (Daniel 5:25-28).

Therefore my words have been rash. Job's outburst in Chapter 3 did not curse God but it did come close. Job here admitted that his words were indeed rash, explaining that it was because of the excessive heaviness of his grief.

For the arrows of the Almighty are in me. Job explained why his suffering was so deep and his words were so rash. It was because he felt that God himself had attacked and cursed him: <<*he bent his bow and set me as a mark for his arrow*>> (Lamentations 3:12). He felt that God had shot arrows at him; had sent poison against him; and had arrayed his terrors against Job. Job both opened (v.4) and closed (Job 7:20) this speech with the picture of God shooting arrows in him.

Arrows are a fitting analogy because Job's troubles came on him quickly and silently, piercing his heart and causing him to feel the pain of a mortal wound. The arrows of God was in a warning given by the Lord through the Song of Moses: <<*I will heap disasters upon them, spend my arrows against them: wasting hunger, burning consumption, bitter pestilence*>> (Deuteronomy 32:23-24a).

Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any flavour in the juice of mallows? Job described how the words of Eliphaz 'tasted' to him. They were weak and flavourless, and certainly did not give Job any health or strength. Charles Spurgeon commented, "The speech, also, to which Job had listened from Eliphaz the Temanite did not put much sweetness into his mouth; for it was devoid of sympathy and consolation. If you read it at home you will see that it was worthy to be the first of a singular selection of galling utterances. He had spoken as harshly and severely as if he were a judge addressing a criminal who was suffering no more than he deserved."

The mallow is a translation of the genus *Malva* and is reputed to have many healing properties and it was probably used in medicines at the time. The 3rd Century BC physician Diphilus of Siphnus wrote that 'mallow juice lubricates the windpipe, nourishes, and is easily digested.'

Does the wild ass bray over its grass, or the ox low over its fodder? Job insisted that he had reason for his grief. The donkey does not bray and the ox does not low when they have enough food; in the same analogy, Job's is not complaining without reason.

⁸ 'O that I might have my request,
and that God would grant my desire;

9 that it would please God to crush me,
that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!
10 This would be my consolation;
I would even exult in unrelenting pain;
for I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

Job 6:8-10

'O that I might have my request, and that God would grant my desire; that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!

Although Job lamented his birth in Chapter 3, only now does he express a hope for death at God's hand to alleviate his suffering. Although Job never seems to have contemplated suicide, he wished God himself would end his life. The idea may again have God as an archer shooting arrows at Job. He pleads that God might simply launch more arrows and end his life, i.e. cut me off from life. There were similar cries to the Lord from Moses: <<*If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once – if I have found favour in your sight – and do not let me see my misery*>> (Numbers 11:15), and David: <<*In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help*>> (Psalm 31:22 NIV).

When Job says, "I have not denied the words of the Holy One," he is referring, at least in part, to the fact that he has not concealed something that is out of accord with what God desires of his servants – something that Eliphaz had implied in his first response: <<*How happy is the one whom God reproves; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty*>> (Job 5:17). Jesus warns those in the church age about such denial: <<*Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*>> (Mark 8:38). Through Isaiah, God spoke out against King Sennacherib of Assyria who had blasphemed the Holy One: <<*Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and haughtily lifted your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel!*>> (2 Kings 19:22).

11 What is my strength, that I should wait?
And what is my end, that I should be patient?
12 Is my strength the strength of stones,
or is my flesh bronze?
13 In truth I have no help in me,
and any resource is driven from me.

Job 6:11-13

What is my strength, that I should wait? Job reflected the sense of hopelessness of the severe and chronic sufferer. Sensing no inner strength to meet the present and future challenges, he felt no hope at all. Job's anguish is in full view here, i.e. is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze?

In truth I have no help in me. In his despair, Job is living without hope; certainly he reveals that he cannot overcome his difficulties in his own strength: any resource is driven from me. Job will later give a similar but almost sarcastic response to further accusations by his friends: <<*How you have helped one who has no power! How you have assisted the arm that has no strength!*>> (Job 26:2).

- 14 'Those who withhold kindness from a friend
forsake the fear of the Almighty.
- 15 My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed,
like freshets that pass away,
16 that run dark with ice,
turbid with melting snow.
- 17 In time of heat they disappear;
when it is hot, they vanish from their place.
- 18 The caravans turn aside from their course;
they go up into the waste, and perish.
- 19 The caravans of Tema look,
the travellers of Sheba hope.
- 20 They are disappointed because they were confident;
they come there and are confounded.
- 21 Such you have now become to me;
you see my calamity, and are afraid.
- 22 Have I said, "Make me a gift"?
Or, "From your wealth offer a bribe for me"?
- 23 Or, "Save me from an opponent's hand"?
Or, "Ransom me from the hand of oppressors"?

Job 6:14-23

After Eliphaz suggests that Job should consider his suffering as an indication that he has been a fool commencing in Job 5:3, Job argues that those who withhold kindness from a friend are themselves acting out of accord with wisdom (i.e. they forsake the fear of the Almighty). Job here made his most basic accusation against Eliphaz, “You should show me kindness, even if were true that I had forsaken the fear of the Almighty.”

My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed. Even though only Eliphaz had previously spoken, Job addressed his three friends collectively. Either this was out of politeness not wanting to single out Eliphaz, or because Job believed that the attitude and silence of his other companions meant they agreed with Eliphaz.

A torrent-bed is a wadi, a depression or rift in the rocks that gathers water from cloudbursts or melting ice, which races down the slope. Desert travellers could not carry sufficient water; they depended on rains or melting snow, which quickly dried up in the hot sun. Job accused his friends of being as unreliable as a snow-fed stream that vanishes when it is hot.

There is a clear contrast here between these men and the promises of Jesus: <<Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water’>> (John 4:10), and: <<On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”’ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified>> (John 7:37-39).

Both Tema and Sheba continue the south-eastern setting of the book; refer to Job 2:11 and the associated comments.

They are disappointed because they were confident; they come there and are confounded. Job shows how deep the disappointment is of those who have such high expectations of life only to be brought so low for no apparent reason just as he had: <<Her nobles send their servants for water; they come to the cisterns, they find no water, they return with their vessels empty. They are ashamed and dismayed and cover their heads, because the ground is cracked. Because there has been no rain on the land the farmers are dismayed; they cover their head>> (Jeremiah 14:3-4), and: <<Be dismayed, you farmers, wail, you vine-dressers, over the wheat and the barley; for the crops of the field are ruined>> (Joel 1:11).

Such you have now become to me; you see my calamity, and are afraid. Verse 21 is the climax of Job’s reaction to his friends’ counsel. They offered no help. The

verse is like a sermon about the special strength needed for people to be willing to make themselves available when they see others in a truly dreadful condition. The risk involved makes them afraid.

Have I said. Job was not asking his friends to pay him money or to ransom him from kidnappers. All he wanted was some words of comfort, but he heard none.

- 24 'Teach me, and I will be silent;
make me understand how I have gone wrong.
- 25 How forceful are honest words!
But your reproof, what does it reprove?
- 26 Do you think that you can reprove words,
as if the speech of the desperate were wind?
- 27 You would even cast lots over the orphan,
and bargain over your friend.
- 28 'But now, be pleased to look at me;
for I will not lie to your face.
- 29 Turn, I pray, let no wrong be done.
Turn now, my vindication is at stake.
- 30 Is there any wrong on my tongue?
Cannot my taste discern calamity?

Job 6:24-30

Teach me, and I will be silent. Job simply wants God to tell him what his error was and he will say no more but accept what the Lord teaches him: <<***Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few***>> (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

If **honest words** are used properly, they can function to **reprove** a person, discouraging them from taking a foolish path. However, Job argues that as a **desperate** man he is pouring out his complaint before God and that his friends assume wrongly that his **words** reveal something in need of their rebuke. As the dialogue progresses, Job will increasingly argue that the aim of his friends' rebuke misses him entirely. Bildad will echo Job's reference to his own speech as **wind** in the opening lines of the response that follows: <<***How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?***>> (Job 8:2).

Instead of comforting Job, Eliphaz was as bad as someone who would overwhelm the fatherless and undermine his friend. Now he seems to retaliate with charges of his own: **You would even cast lots over the orphan, and bargain over your friend.** There is no more indication that the friends gambled for orphans than there is that Job asked for bribes. Perhaps this is what Job is getting at. However, their relationship has certainly deteriorated if they are already swapping insults like this.

For the first time, Job directly asserts before God his innocence, which requires his **vindication**. Job very much wanted Eliphaz and his other friends to see that his present calamity was not judgement for some grievous if hidden sin. Although this claim is directed to the friends, Job will soon repeat it to God by implication in: ***<<If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you?>>*** (Job 7:20), and then throughout his speeches with ever-increasing insistence.

Is there any wrong on my tongue? Cannot my taste discern calamity? Previously in this chapter Job has represented the words of Eliphaz as bits of food; bits that were very unsatisfying to Job in his present suffering:

- According to the analogy of animals, if the words of Eliphaz had comforted and satisfied Job, he would not have cried out as he did in Job Chapter 3 (v.5).
- The words of Eliphaz were like flavourless food (v.6).
- The words of Eliphaz were like rotten, loathsome food (v.7).
- Job can discern the unsavoury character of the words of Eliphaz (v.30).