



Job - Chapter Seven

- 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 Seven

Job continues to deplore his helpless and afflicted state. He argues with God concerning his afflictions, describes the disturbed state of his mind by visions in the night, abhors life, and, showing that he is unworthy of the notice of God, begs forgiveness and respite.

II.b.i.2.B [Job 7:1-21 - Job: My Suffering Is without End](#)

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- 1 'Do not human beings have a hard service on earth,
and are not their days like the days of a labourer?
- 2 Like a slave who longs for the shadow,
and like labourers who look for their wages,
- 3 so I am allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.
- 4 When I lie down I say, "When shall I rise?"

But the night is long,
and I am full of tossing until dawn.

⁵ My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt;
my skin hardens, then breaks out again.

Job 7:1-5

Do not human beings have a hard service on earth? The words ‘hard service’ are, according to Adam Clarke and others, descriptive of military service. The Latin Vulgate translates it: <<*The life of man is a warfare upon earth*>>. The early English Coverdale translation has it: <<*Is not the life of man upon earth a very battle?*>>. With this Job communicated both the struggle of life, together with the idea that he has been drafted unwillingly into this battle. In other cases it identifies a period of tribulation resulting from sinful behaviour, as identified in the words: <<*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins*>> (Isaiah 40:2 NIV).

So I am allotted months of emptiness. Job saw his present suffering like the futile, discouraging work of a slave or a labourer. He felt there was no hope or reward, only weariness: <<*A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last*>> (Job 14:1-2), and: <<*For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity*>> (Ecclesiastes 2:23).

Nights of misery are apportioned to me. Job described his physical condition in painful terms. He suffered from insomnia and his skin affliction came back again and again. Others too describe such suffering: <<*I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping*>> (Psalm 6:6), <<*Again I saw all the oppressions that are practised under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed – with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power – with no one to comfort them*>> (Ecclesiastes 4:1), <<*O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!*>> (Jeremiah 9:1), and: <<*She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies*>> (Lamentations 1:2).

My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt. This is the description given to a living corpse as the body decays and yet Job still lives. It is a gruesome image of his utter misery.

6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
and come to their end without hope.
7 'Remember that my life is a breath;
my eye will never again see good.
8 The eye that beholds me will see me no more;
while your eyes are upon me, I shall be gone.
9 As the cloud fades and vanishes,
so those who go down to Sheol do not come up;
10 they return no more to their houses,
nor do their places know them any more.

Job 7:6-10

My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Job did not mean this in a positive sense, as in saying "My, look how fast the time is going by." As described in the previous verses, in this season of affliction time is dragging by for Job through his sleepless and painful nights. Yet when he looked at his life in totality, it seemed to be a meaningless blur, spent without hope and as a breath: <<*You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath*>> (Psalm 39:5), and: <<*Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*>> (James 4:14).

The only sadder concept that a life lived without hope is for someone to die without hope. A main part of the Christian message is that people can live in the hope of the promises of Christ and die with the sure knowledge of a better life yet to come.

So those who go down to Sheol do not come up. This is one of Job's statements about the afterlife that are sprinkled throughout the book. These statements are a combination of uncertainty as here and triumphant confidence as in Job 19:25-26. Sheol is the proper name for the place where people go after death.

Jesus would later say: <<*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it*>> (Matthew 16:18). The gates of Hades is the Greek *hadēs* or hell, and is also referred to as 'the gates of Sheol' <<*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), and 'the gates of death' <<*Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?*>> (Job 38:17), <<*Be gracious to me, O Lord. See what I suffer from those who hate me; you are the one who lifts me*>>

up from the gates of death>> (Psalm 9:13), and: <<they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death>> (Psalm 107:18). Gates were essential for a city's security and power. Hades, or Sheol, is the realm of the dead. Death will not overpower the church or prevail against it. The gates of Hades is a familiar Semitic expression for the threshold of the realm of death. The words used by Jesus suggest that death itself assaults Christ's church, but death cannot crush it. The church will endure until Christ's return, and no opposition, even widespread martyrdom of Christians or the oppression of the final antichrist, can prevent the ultimate triumph of God's purposes in history.

- 11 'Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
- 12 Am I the Sea, or the Dragon,
that you set a guard over me?
- 13 When I say, "My bed will comfort me,
my couch will ease my complaint",
- 14 then you scare me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,
- 15 so that I would choose strangling
and death rather than this body.
- 16 I loathe my life; I would not live for ever.
Let me alone, for my days are a breath.

Job 7:11-16

In the initial response to each friend, Job primarily addresses his friends first (Job 6:1-7:10) before turning to offer further lament and complaint to God (vv.12-21). The three parallel statements of v.11 (I will ...) mark the transition from Job's response to Eliphaz to his response to God. That transition is also represented by the change in reference to God from the third person, e.g. 'he' in Job 6:9, to the second person, e.g. 'you' in v.12. Similar statements mark the major transition in Job's initial responses to Bildad (Job 10:1-2) and Zophar (Job 13:13-17).

I will speak in the anguish of my spirit. Job asks whether God considers him to be something as large or powerful as the Sea or the Dragon because he feels his suffering is disproportionate to the weight of his being. Job here cried out to God,

first wondering if he were not a dangerous creature that needed to be guarded and restrained by God.

In the literature of the ancient Near East, the sea is often described or personified as a threat to the created order that needs to be contained or conquered; refer to Job 26:12 and 38:8-11. Sea, Hebrew *Yam*, and Dragon or Sea Monster, Hebrew *Tannin*, are both known figures from Canaanite religion: *Yam* as the power contesting supremacy with Baal, and *Tannin* as one of the chaos monsters: <<*You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters*>> (Psalm 74:13), and: <<*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?*>> (Isaiah 51:9).

Charles Spurgeon commented, “We hear of persons being ‘shadowed’ by the police, and certain people feel as if they were shadowed by God; they are mysteriously tracked by the great Spirit, and they know and feel it. Wherever they go, an eye is upon them, and they cannot hide from it.” And again, “Listen. To argue from our insignificance is poor pleading; for the little things are just those against which there is most need to watch. If you were a sea, or a whale, God might leave you alone; but as you are a feeble and sinful creature, which can do more hurt than a sea, or a whale, you need constant watching. Do not say, ‘Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, that thou settest a watch over me?’ for the Lord may answer, ‘You are more capacious for evil than a sea, and more wild than a sea-monster.’”

Indeed, humans are more like the sea than they might like to admit:

- The sea is restless, and so is human nature.
- The sea can be furious and terrible, and so can people.
- The sea can never be satisfied, and neither can sinful man.
- The sea is mischievous and destructive, and so is sinful man.
- The sea will not obey, and neither will sinful man.

Then you scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions. Job was denied even the comfort of sleep and rest. When he did lay down to sleep upon his bed or couch, he was disturbed with nightmares and terrifying visions.

I loathe my life. Job will declare his rejection of his life again with the same verb in Job 9:21 and 10:1. When Job is fully confronted with the mystery of God, he will reject his words using the same verb: <<*I despise myself*>> (Job 42:6a). The verb is repeated across these verses to contrast Job’s changed attitude as he comes to recognise that he had given up on understanding what his own life and circumstances meant in a manner that assumed more than he could possibly see or know.

Let me alone, for my days are a breath. Job's condition is so miserable that, at this point, his soul would prefer the release of death, as did Elijah: <<*But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors'>> (1 Kings 19:4), and Jonah: <<*And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live>> (Jonah 4:3). Job was so miserable that he just said to God, "Let me alone." At this moment it appears to Job that God is the tormentor. The reader knows God was using a secondary means and that Job's conception of God as his tormentor was wrong.**

Job's words here are a reminder of something remarkable. Although his physical suffering was intense and prolonged, Job's spiritual crisis was deeper than his physical or material crisis.

- 17 What are human beings, that you make so much of them,
that you set your mind on them,
18 visit them every morning,
test them every moment?
19 Will you not look away from me for a while,
let me alone until I swallow my spittle?
20 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?
21 Why do you not pardon my transgression
and take away my iniquity?
For now I shall lie in the earth;
you will seek me, but I shall not be.'

Job 7:17-21

The opening line of v.17 (What are human beings, that you make so much of them) echoes the thought of: <<*what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?>> (Psalm 8:4). However, where Psalm 8 marvels at how humanity has been crowned with glory by God, Job laments what he describes as the burdensome weight of God's watchful presence crushing him as a mortal being (v.20).*

Scholars are divided as to which came first, Job Chapter 7 or Psalm 8. It would seem best to say that the lines from Job came first, and that David in Psalm 8 reworked Job's painful theme into one filled with praise.

Job asked, "What are human beings?" but he did not wait for the answer. Humankind, it seems, mean more to God than can be known else he would never take such time and pains with them. When a lapidary spends years over a single diamond, even the most careless observer begins to appraise properly its intrinsic value and have some understanding of why the effort is worthy of the time spent. As the apostle Paul put it: *<<But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God>>* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

That you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment. Job felt at this moment that God's attention was unwelcome. If his entire calamity was from the hand of God, Job wondered why God could not simply leave him alone.

Let me alone until I swallow my spittle is a Middle Eastern idiom for 'just a moment,' perhaps the equivalent of 'the twinkling of an eye.' Job wondered why God could not look away from him for just the smallest moment and give him rest from his torment.

If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? It is as if Job is saying, "Please God, just leave me alone. How have I wronged you?" Job could not understand why he seemed to be God's target; and if Job had sinned to cause all his suffering, he asked God "Why then do you not pardon my transgression?" Job was so honest with God in passages like v.20 that it seems to have been altered by Jewish scribes who were uncomfortable with his bold honesty with God. According to Elmer Smick, "Ancient scribal tradition and the LXX show the original reading to be 'Have I become a burden to you?' Most translations, following later Hebrew manuscripts, have it 'I am burden to myself.' Yet the probable original text shows how deep Job's grief is, feeling himself to be a burden to what feels like an unloving and uncaring God."

Once more the reader benefits from knowing 'the story-behind-the-story,' which Job and his friends do not know at this point in the narrative. Job believed that God was against him and was punishing him, but it just was not true. Charles Spurgeon commented, "Job was not being punished; he was being honoured. God was giving to him a name like that of the great ones of the earth. The Lord was lifting him up, promoting him, putting him into the front rank, making a great saint of him, causing him to become one of the fathers and patterns in the ancient Church of God. He was really doing for Job such extraordinarily good things that you or I, in looking back upon his whole

history, might well say, 'I would be quite content to take Job's afflictions if I might also have Job's grace, and Job's place in the Church of God.'"

For now I shall lie in the earth; you will seek me, but I shall not be. Job wished he could escape both life and God by going into the earth - to his grave. This is one of his obviously pessimistic passages about the afterlife.