



Job - Chapter Nine

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 Nine

Job acknowledges God's justice and man's sinfulness (vv.1-3), celebrates his Almighty power as manifested on the earth and in the heavens (vv.4-10), maintains that God afflicts the innocent as well as the wicked, without any respect to their works, and has delivered the earth into the hands of the wicked (vv.11-24). Finally, Job complains of his lot and maintains his innocence (vv.25-35).

II.b.i.4 Job 9:1-10:22 - Job: How can a Mortal be Just Before God?

Job accepts the truth of both God's justice and his promises to the upright (9:2), but in light of his friends' suggested accusations, he feels trapped. Job wonders how he could plead his case before God when there is no one who would be able to arbitrate the case (9:3-35). Here Job's speech is relentlessly legal: Chapter 9 is framed by the term 'contend,' Hebrew *rib*, and legal terms are liberally sprinkled throughout the chapter. Thus Job laments before God the weight of suffering in his life (10:1-22).

II.b.i.4.A Job 9:1-35 - Job Replies: There Is No Mediator

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Then Job answered:

² ‘Indeed I know that this is so;

but how can a mortal be just before God?

Job 9:1-2

When Job says, “Indeed I know that this is so,” he is most likely affirming that he also believes what is at the core of Bildad’s response: God is just, and he will not reject the upright; refer to Job 8:3 and 8:20. However, given these truths and how the friends have interpreted his circumstances, Job slightly modifies the original question of Eliphaz’s dream and asks, but how can a mortal be just before God? Job’s response to Bildad was wisely stated. Job obviously suffered more than normal; yet no one could rightly accuse him of sinning more than normal. If Job was not righteous before God, then how could any man be? If God is just and Job is in fact innocent of the foolishness or wickedness his friends suggest, how can he go about arguing his case?

It is important to understand that the Bible speaks of human righteousness in two senses:

- A person can be righteous in a relative sense, where one can properly be considered as righteous among men as both Noah (Genesis 7:1) and Job (Job 1:1) were so considered.
- A person can be righteous in a forensic or legal sense, declared and considered righteous by God through faith (Romans 5:19).

Job’s question here concerns the first aspect of righteousness, although it is also relevant to the other aspect of righteousness. Job primarily wanted to know, “If I have not been righteous enough to escape the judgement of God, then who can be?” Yet in the ultimate sense, Job’s question is the most important question in the world. How can a man find God’s approval? How can a man be considered righteous and not guilty before God?

³ If one wished to contend with him,
one could not answer him once in a thousand.

⁴ He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength
— who has resisted him, and succeeded? —

⁵ he who removes mountains, and they do not know it,
when he overturns them in his anger;

⁶ who shakes the earth out of its place,

and its pillars tremble;
7 who commands the sun, and it does not rise;
who seals up the stars;
8 who alone stretched out the heavens
and trampled the waves of the Sea;
9 who made the Bear and Orion,
the Pleiades and the chambers of the south;
10 who does great things beyond understanding,
and marvellous things without number.
11 Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him;
he moves on, but I do not perceive him.
12 He snatches away; who can stop him?
Who will say to him, "What are you doing?"
13 'God will not turn back his anger;
the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath him.

Job 9:3-13

If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand. Job does not respond further to the specifics of Bildad's argument but instead describes the difficulty of anyone arguing a case before God (vv.3-4), given his power and strength (vv.5-10). The form of the Hebrew verse is significant: it is a 'participial hymn.' The name of such poems derives from the Hebrew verb form used in vv.5-10; they typically offer praise to God for his mighty acts in creation, e.g. Psalm 136, Jeremiah 10:12-13, and Amos 4:13, 5:8-9 and 9:5-6. Here, however, like the inversion of Psalm 8 in Job 7:11, Job uses the form to declare what he perceives as God's uncreative power; refer also to Job 12:13-25. Verse 10 repeats yet another line from Eliphaz: <<**He does great things and unsearchable, marvellous things without number**>> (Job 5:9), but Job uses it to reinforce the seeming futility of attempting to contend with God.

Here the word 'contend' is the technical term for conducting a lawsuit. Job understood that man could not debate with God or demand answers from him. Sadly, this will become the basic sin of Job in the story, the sin he repented of in Job 42:1-6.

Who has resisted him, and succeeded? Job agreed with the basic premise of Bildad, that one is never blessed by hardening one's self against God. Yet Job did not think that this principle applied to him in this situation because he knew in his heart that he had not hardened himself against God.

Who made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the chambers of the south? Job praised the great might of God, who created the worlds and put the sun and stars in the sky. Yet the might of God was no comfort to Job; it just made him feel that God was more distant than ever.

The chambers of the south refers to the most remote, hidden, and secret parts of the south; so called, because the stars which are under the southern pole are hidden from those in the northern hemisphere and appeared enclosed and lodged as in a chamber to people in ancient times.

Who does great things beyond understanding, and marvellous things without number. Job considered the great works of God in the universe and how they displayed the majesty and power of God. Yet this understanding of the greatness and might of God did not comfort Job; it made him feel that God was too great to either notice, i.e. he passes by me, and I do not see him, or care and help Job, that is, God will not turn back his anger. It was as if Job cried out, "Why is God so hard to figure out?" His friends did not think that God was hard to figure out; the problem was simple to them. Job had sinned in some bad and unusual way, therefore all this disaster came upon him. Yet Job, knowing not all the truth as revealed to the reader in Job Chapters 1-2, but at least knowing his own heart and integrity, knew that God was not so simple to figure out.

Rahab, like Leviathan in Job 3:8 and the Dragon or Sea Monster in Job 7:12, is the name of a beast from the myths of the non-Israelite peoples. Here, the name seems to represent specifically the forces of chaos. Earlier Job had asked that those ready to demolish Leviathan would remove his day from the universe. Only God is able to vanquish such powers, as Job here confesses. Job cannot hope to contest with God, however just Job may judge his own case to be.

Rahab is also used in another sense: <<For Egypt's help is worthless and empty, therefore I have called her, 'Rahab who sits still'>> (Isaiah 30:6-7). Like a monster inhabiting the Nile, Egypt appears formidable but, in fact, just sits there.

14 How then can I answer him,
choosing my words with him?

15 Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.

- 16 If I summoned him and he answered me,
I do not believe that he would listen to my voice.
- 17 For he crushes me with a tempest,
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
- 18 he will not let me get my breath,
but fills me with bitterness.
- 19 If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one!
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?
- 20 Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.

Job 9:14-20

How then can I answer him? Job's problem is clear; he understood that God is righteous and mighty; what he cannot understand is how God will use that righteousness or might to help Job. God seemed distant and impersonal to Job, and to many who suffer: <<*Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour*>> (Isaiah 45:15).

Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him. Job states here and again in v.20 his contention that his friends have applied their theology to him and his circumstances in a way that traps him. Job's friends have argued that God is just, that he does not reject the blameless, and that Job's circumstances indicate he is hiding something for which he ought to repent. Job agrees that God is just but feels there is no room for him to make the case that he is innocent of what his friends presume.

For he crushes me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause. Job felt that God's might was against him and not for him. In this sense it did no good for Job to consider the awesome power of God because that power seemed to be set against him, making his situation all the more hopeless.

Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. Job gave eloquent voice to his exasperation. He felt as though there was nothing he could do to please God or come into his favour again. When Job claims that he is not guilty he is not claiming to be sinless or having moral perfection; he is simply stating relative innocence, believing he has not done anything to deserve this kind of treatment. He was speaking in a similar vein to that of the apostle Paul: <<*I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who*

judges me>> (1 Corinthians 4:4). If Job were to proclaim his own righteousness it would not be true. If he were to proclaim his own righteousness, the words themselves would be evidence of enough pride and arrogance to condemn him before the Lord. If he were to proclaim his own righteousness, he would say that God is wrong about man.

Although Job states that if any person claims self-justification their own mouth will condemn yet the apostle Paul acknowledges that if God justifies them, no one can condemn them: <<*Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us*>> (Romans 8:33-34).

Charles Spurgeon provides his own parable, “Years ago, there was, as old man, in Wiltshire, who according to his own statement, was a hundred and three years of age, he had never neglected his parish church, he had brought up eleven children, and had no help from the parish, and he expected that, by-and-by, he should go home to God, for ‘he had never done anything wrong in his life that he knowed about.’ ‘But,’ said someone to him, ‘you are a sinner, you know.’ ‘I know I ain’t,’ he said. ‘Well, but God says that you are.’ And what, think you, did that old man reply? He said, ‘God may say what he likes, but I know I ain’t.’ So, you see, he even contradicted God himself, and is not that a great sin for anybody to commit?”

The form of the verb translated would prove me perverse makes it possible for the subject to be either ‘he’ (referring to God) or ‘it’ (referring to Job’s mouth). For either possibility, the point is the same. If his mouth would prove him to be in the wrong, it is because Job thinks that God would find his words wanting. When Job says, ‘I am innocent,’ he unknowingly echoes God’s description of him in the prologue: <<*The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil’*>> (Job 1:8), and: <<*The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason’*>> (Job 2:3).

²¹ I am blameless; I do not know myself;

I loathe my life.

²² It is all one; therefore I say,

he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.

²³ When disaster brings sudden death,

he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.

- ²⁴ The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the eyes of its judges —
if it is not he, who then is it?

Job 9:21-24

I do not know myself. Job gave vent to his tortured feelings. He genuinely believed that he was blameless, yet at the same time he admitted that he did not know himself well enough to have a completely clear conscience. Job seems to be saying that he does not care whether he lives or dies. He is prepared to risk his life to find justice: <<*I will take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand*>> (Job 13:14).

I loathe my life. Job declared his rejection of his life with the same verb in Job 7:16 and will do so again in Job 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.

While Job's friends have assumed that his suffering is evidence of some hidden wickedness, Job argues that from what is observable, both the blameless and the wicked are destroyed, fall prey to disaster, and suffer from the perversion of justice (v.24) — and that all of these things are governed, ultimately, by God, i.e. if it is not he, who then is it?

He mocks at the calamity of the innocent. Job felt that not only was God distant and silent, but he was also having sport at the expense of godly sufferers like Job. Charles Spurgeon once said, "As one is startled by a shriek, or saddened by a groan, so these sharp utterances of Job astonish us at first, and then awake our pity. Physical sufferings had produced a strain on Job's mind, and he sought relief by expressing his anguish. Like some solitary prisoner in the gloomy keep of an old castle, he carves on the walls pictures of the abject despondencies which haunt him. His afflictions are aggravated by vain efforts to alleviate them: he wounds his hand with the rough hammer and nail with which he is engraving his grievances. Of such tortures many of us have had a taste."

- ²⁵ 'My days are swifter than a runner;
they flee away, they see no good.

- ²⁶ They go by like skiffs of reed,

like an eagle swooping on the prey.
27 If I say, “I will forget my complaint;
I will put off my sad countenance and be of good cheer”,
28 I become afraid of all my suffering,
for I know you will not hold me innocent.
29 I shall be condemned;
why then do I labour in vain?
30 If I wash myself with soap
and cleanse my hands with lye,
31 yet you will plunge me into filth,
and my own clothes will abhor me.

Job 9:25-31

My days are swifter than a runner. Job felt that his life was spinning and running completely out of control. Time moved fast and was like a hostile predator against him, i.e. like an eagle swooping on the prey: <<*they fly like an eagle swift to devour*>> (Habakkuk 1:8b). Job felt that his life was passing by so quickly that his days would be over and God would leave this whole matter unresolved.

For I know you will not hold me innocent. Job felt that he had already been tried and condemned by God, and that it would even do him no good to cleanse himself before God. If he did, he believed that God would just plunge him into the filth again. Job’s experience told him it seems that sometimes God crushes the innocent for no reason at all. The reader, who is privileged to see the drama from the divine perspective, knows that Job was innocent and that God did have a cause, a cause beyond the comprehension of Job, a cause that could not be revealed to Job at this point in time.

32 For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him,
that we should come to trial together.
33 There is no umpire between us,
who might lay his hand on us both.
34 If he would take his rod away from me,
and not let dread of him terrify me,
35 then I would speak without fear of him,
for I know I am not what I am thought to be.

Job 9:32-35

For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him. Job here keenly felt the distance between himself and God. He felt unjustly treated by God, yet felt there was no way to address the problem. God could not be confronted with Job's unexplained circumstances, so Job despaired of every finding a satisfactory answer to his problem.

There is no umpire between us. Understanding the distance between himself and God, Job longed for someone to bridge the gap between them. When Job says, "there is no umpire between us" or wishes that there were someone to arbitrate, his words are partially an indictment against his friends, who have not served him well as comforters, while upholding both the character of God and the integrity of Job. In light of his friends' failure, Job longs for someone who could hear his case impartially and for the removal of the threat of further suffering, so that he could speak freely.

Job needed someone to sort out the differences between himself and God. His prior belief system did not do that; his experience did not do that; neither did the counsel of his friends. Recognising this need, Job cried out for a mediator between himself and God. Little did he know of a time yet to come: <<*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), <<*But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises*>> (Hebrews 8:6).