**Job 23**

**Job’s 3rd Response—I’m No Match for God**

**My Complaint is “Bitter”—I Need Some Sympathy**

**Introduction:**

In this chapter Job responds to his friend’s, Eliphaz’ most venomous attack on his integrity and innocence. It marks the seventh time that Job gives a response and is the third time that he responds to Eliphaz’ charges and accusations.

Job ignores answering Eliphaz’s allegations, which he does in Chapter 31, and instead reflects on two issues he has discussed before: (1) the injustice of his suffering and (2) presenting his case before God. At the same time, Job admits that God remains inaccessible, uninterested and unfair.

As Job continues his response in the next chapter [24] he also wonders why God seemed to be strangely silent about the sins of others.

Job’s complaint is still bitter and he can’t understand why he’s suffering so horribly. Such apparent injustices, coupled with God’s silence, left Job perplexed and instead of immediately answering Eliphaz’s cruel and hurtful charges, he vents his frustration and confusion.

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**vv. 1-7**

**Job Reiterates That His Condition is Unbearable**

[1 Then Job answered and said: 2 “Even today my complaint is bitter; my hand is listless because of my groaning. 3 Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! 4 I would present my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. 5 I would know the words which He would answer me and understand what He would say to me. 6 Would He contend with me in His great power? No! But He would take note of me. 7 There the upright could reason with Him and I would be delivered forever from my Judge.”]

[“Even today my complaint is bitter…..”] After months of suffering [Job 7:3] Job still has experienced no resolution, no answer and no help from God and his attitude is still one of bitterness, i.e., he is disgusted with his situation—it is repulsive to him. This is the 4th of 5 times Job mentions this [ref. Job 3:20; 7:11; 10:1; 27:2] so it’s very heartbreaking for him.

Job is discouraged and distressed because he felt like he was “at the end of his rope”, at his “wits end”, in figuring out how to get resolution and relief from his physical [decaying skin, open sores, painful joints] and mental suffering [anguish, confusion, frustration].

[“…..my hand is listless because of my groaning”] The hand is a symbol of strength and action. The Hebrew literally reads “my hand is heavy”, i.e., weighted down, and Job has no strength or ability to do anything about the calamity that has befallen him. This is causing him to inwardly “groan” over this. Job could not comprehend why and what was happening to him and there was no explanation forthcoming.

His friends had provided him with no help and had made things worse [they were “forgers of lies and worthless physicians”, Job 13:4; and “miserable comforters”, Job 16:2]. On top of this, his own understanding and wisdom had failed to make sense of why he was suffering so horribly. He considered himself faithful to God, righteous and blameless.
Application: But as Christians, when we “groan” in our sufferings, we have this hope and consolation in Jesus Christ:

“No only that, but we also who have the first-fruitds of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body……For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us……Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

—Rom. 8:14, 18-19, 26-30

[“Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat!”] Temporarily ignoring Eliphaz’ outrageous insinuations and accusations [which he addresses in chapter 31], Job again turns his attention to finding help through divine intervention. In the light of his extreme suffering [loss of all his children, including 7 sons and 3 daughters; the loss of his wealth, and worst of all; his terrible skin disease], Job expresses his desire to find out where God is in all this. {also see Job 13:24}.

The irony is that his friends had advised him to do this {see Job 5:8; 8:5; 11:13; 22:23}.

[I would present my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments.] Job again expresses his desire to get a “hearing in court” with God {see Job 10:1-2} so he can defend himself.

I think he’s being pretty presumptuous here. Worse yet, he is also blatantly ignorant because he really doesn’t know what he’s asking! He doesn’t realize what he’d be in for!

Job has probably already given some thought as to what he would say to God if he could appear before Him. He says he would fill his mouth with arguments in presenting his case.

How foolish! We have no credible defense for our rebellion and disobedience—for our sinful nature. No one can go before God, plead “innocence” and defend himself/herself

Application: One does not want to go to court as a plaintiff against God and think they can win their case. Everyone already stands convicted and condemned before God and there is no appeal—the irony is that there is no divine “double-jeopardy”. We cannot and won’t get another trial; we won’t be retried again—it’s a “done deal”. Note:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”—John 3:16-20

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

—Rom. 6:23
“For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”—Rom 3:22-26

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”—Eph. 2:8-10

The only course of action is to come before God and plead “guilty” and fall on the mercy and grace of the Heavenly Judge! You will note that when Job finally comes into the “presence of the LORD God” in Job 38-41 he has a major “attitude adjustment”. Defending himself before the LORD of the Universe is the furthest thing from his mind. Here is what he finally says:

“I know that You can do everything and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, ‘I will question you, and you shall answer Me’. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”—Job 42:2-6

[I would know the words which He would answer me and understand what He would say to me.] Job seems to have mentally rehearsed what he would say to God and now claims that he anticipates what God would say to him. The implication being that it would be a favorable verdict. How foolish and presumptuous.

[Would He contend with me in His great power? No! But He would take note of me.] Continuing his theme of presenting his case before God, and believing he is innocent of any wrong-doing, he asks [and answers] a rhetorical question: would a fair, impartial and just God contend [lit. “to toss”; “grapple or wrangle”] with him according to His great power.

He answers with an emphatic “No!” Job is convinced with certainty that God would NOT use his prerogative of Divine power to strive or fight against with him.

Instead, evidently Job’s expectation was that God would commend him, He would deal kindly and mercifully with him.

[There the upright could reason with Him and I would be delivered forever from my Judge.] Although Job had previously stated that it would be pointless to present his case before God (Job 9:14-16) now, in his desperation to find a plausible solution to his predicament, he changes his position.

Because he is certain that he is an “upright man”, Job expresses his belief that he could successfully reason, i.e., argue /debate, his case before the Heavenly court.

Thus, the divine Judge would acquit him and his troubles would be over.

Application: But the problem with this thinking is that no one is “upright” enough to withstand God’s judgment. Both Jews and Gentiles stand guilty as charged—we are all under the condemnation of sin:
As it is written\(^1\): “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit”; “The poison of asps is under their lips”; “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known”. “There is no fear of God before their eyes”. 

—Rom. 3:10-18

There is only salvation in Jesus Christ:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.—Rom. 3:21-22

vv. 8-9 \(\Rightarrow\) **JOB SEeks GOD BUT CANNOT FIND HIM**

[8 “Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; 9 When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.”]

Job continues describing his frustration at not being able to “find” God and communicate with Him. He has proverbially gone “forward” and “backward”; he has moved to the “left” and the “right”, but God has been elusive.

The Great Judge LORD does not appear in court at our bidding, we cannot *subpoena* Him. He definitely works independently of our demands and timeframe. How foolish of Job to think God, as the ultimate Judge, would appear in “court” with him like a mere man.

If a judge does not appear in court cases cannot be presented to Him. Since Job was searching for God in that kind of spirit it should be no surprise that would be a *futile* exercise and lead to great frustration. That is why Job was both confused and frustrated and his controversy with God was so “bitter”.

The problem is that Job has tried finding the Lord in only two dimensions; “forward” and “backward” and “side-to-side”. He has not tried a third dimension: “down”; that is, *humbling* himself, or “up”, that is, *worshipping* the LORD of Creation. Note:

 “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.”—**Psalms 51:17**

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you; but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?”—**Micah 6:8**

“Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

—**Psalms 29:2**

“So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him”.

—**Psalms 45:11**

“All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name.”

—**Psalms 66:3**

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\(^1\) Paul combines quotes from several Old Testament sources: **Psalms 5:9; 10:7; 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 36:1; 140:3; Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 59:7-8**.
The Lord was much nearer than Job thought but his *spiritual pride* was blinding him to God’s presence! He was self-limiting his search for God to only two dimensions. Note:

“The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit.”
—*Psalms 34:16*

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”—*Rom. 10:8-13*

People search in vain for “salvation” in all the wrong places, material possessions, worldly status, accomplishments, drugs, sex, etc. But it’s not until one makes “peace with God” by humbling themselves through repentance from dead works and trusting in Jesus Christ as personal Savior that eternal salvation is found!

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”—*Acts 4:12*

**vv. 10-12**  
**JOB’S CONFIDENT HOPE THAT HE WILL BE VINDICATED**

[10 “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. 11 My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. 12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”]

“But….”, despite the fact that Job cannot find God in the midst of his suffering and anguish, he is nevertheless confident at the outcome of his calamity. Here Job makes another one of his many affirmations of his innocence; he is pleading “not guilty”.

In a way Job is speaking to himself, “whistling in the dark”, to build himself up. He presumes that God knows he’s innocent and after being examined he’ll come forth as gold—with “flying colors”. [Pure gold is of course highly treasured and useful.]

Well, someone should let God know this will happen because in the end, Job abhors himself and repents in the dust and ashes! But yes, after *that*, finally in the end, Job does “come forth as gold” *(Job 42:10-15)* but not by his own doing—by the grace of God!

*[My foot has held fast to His steps]*  
Job has been tenaciously following in the path the Lord has ordered for him. *Psalms 37:23* says, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORd” and so it has been for Job.

*[I have kept His way and not turned aside.]*  
Job has been faithful to keep the way of the LORd and not allowed anything to distract him from that path.

*[I have not departed from the commandment of His lip]*  
Job has been obedient to follow the commands of the LORd.

*[I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food]*  
Job has made the Word of God his treasure and more necessary than food to sustain him.

What does this all mean? It means that a Christian can be doing and saying all the “right” things yet still harbor pride and bitterness to their detriment!
Application: However, God does use trials and troubles in our Christian life to strengthen our faith and increase the quality of our worship and joy. He refines us as a goldsmith refines gold or a silversmith refines silver.

“I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people' and each one will say, 'The Lord is my God'.”—Zech. 13:9

It is during times of personal crisis that our moral character is tested and we experience God’s strength, comfort and grace in a way we never could any other way. It has been said that God never promised that a Christian would miss the storm, but He has promised that we would make it safely to the harbor.

“So let the one who thinks he is standing be careful that he does not fall. 13 No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.”—1 Cor. 10:12-13

vv. 13-14➢ THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE GOD—HE IS UNIQUE

[13 “But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does. 14 For He performs what is appointed for me and many such things are with Him.”]

Job makes some very important statements about God, including a rhetorical question.

[He is unique] Lit. “He is in One”. That is, the LORD God is “one of a kind”, He stands alone above all others, and all other things. The LORD is in a class by Himself.

More than 500 years later, this truth would be famously memorialized in the Law, in what is known as the Jewish “Shema” [i.e., “Hear”]:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”—Deut. 6:4-5

These two verses are widely regarded as the very heart of Jewish confession and faith. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment of all, He quoted from this text [Matt. 22:37-38].

This aspect of uniqueness carries over into the salvation message which is the heart of the Gospel:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”—Acts 4:12

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”—Eph. 4:4-6

Here is how King Solomon said it about 1000 years after Job:

“I know that whatever God does it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.”—Eccl. 3:14

And the unique name of the One True God is Yahweh, or Jehovah; meaning “I am”, i.e., the “self-existent One”.

Job Chapter 23

Klaus G. Schiessel

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[and who can make Him change?] No one! Nor does He change. This attribute is ascribed to the Son, Jesus Christ who is “the same yesterday, today and tomorrow” {Heb. 13:8}. There is no variation of God from any perspective; He is the same from every angle {James 1:17}.

It is a timeless attribute of God that He alone, above and beyond all else, stands absolutely unique!

**Application**: The Gospel message is unique and one-of-a-kind over every other belief system, religious and philosophical, in at least two major areas:

1. It is the only belief system that uniquely teaches salvation is a gift to be accepted—it cannot be earned!
2. It is the only belief system that teaches its founder had to be killed and is risen from the dead—faith is in a living Savior!

So the next time someone tries to tell you that Christianity is not unique and all religions are basically the same; that all faith-based belief systems eventually lead to God, refute that foolish notion by pointing out the uniqueness of the LORD God and His message of salvation.

[And whatever His soul desires, that He does] No one can influence God’s judgment or make Him change His plans. He does whatever He desires {Ps. 33:11; 115:3; 135:6; Isa. 14:27; 46:10; Dan. 4:35} and no one and nothing can thwart His purposes—what an awesome and mighty God! Job has actually already acknowledged this {e.g., Job 9:12; 10:7; 12:14; 42:2} as well as his friends {e.g., Job 11:10}. The wisdom of King Solomon:

“There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand.”—Prov. 19:21

And Job acknowledges this great attribute of God applies to God’s dealings with him as well! As the psalmist puts it:

“Lord, make me to know my end and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor.”—Ps. 39:4-5

**vv. 15-17** [**JOB ACKNOWLEDGES HIS FEAR OF THE LORD**]

[15 “Therefore I am terrified at His presence; when I consider this, I am afraid of Him. 16 For God made my heart weak and the Almighty terrifies me; 17 Because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness and He did not hide deep darkness from my face.”]

Considering just how awesome and unique the LORD is, Job now admits that he is “terrified” [lit. “tremble inwardly”] at the thought of being in God’s presence. Job is “shaking in his boots” and is utterly dismayed at the anticipation that he may have to face the God he so desperately sought a “court hearing” with.

Not only that, but Job was weakened in the flesh when he considered the implications of God’s sovereignty {vv.13-14}: the power, majesty, and glory of ALMIGHTY GOD. This is what the 24 Elders, the angels and the Redeemed sing about:
“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!......Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, forever and ever!......Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”—Rev 5:12-13; 7:5

Note that this worship is ultimately of the Savior, the LAMB OF GOD—Jesus Christ!

It is important to note that Job’s fear and weakness came not because he was hiding some grievous sin [as Eliphaz had charged; Job 22:10], but because of his awe and reverence for God.

Although Job knew he was not “wicked” and he had not committed some horrible iniquity, nevertheless he was greatly shaken because he cannot understand why such a tragic calamity had befallen him. Job considered himself a faithful man and he is now in “uncharted waters” in his relationship with God. Job probably never in his wildest imagination expected that God would allow him to suffer in such an extreme way.

Since God was the unique He is the ultimate Judge and final Arbitrator and the prospect of getting the actual answer to his suffering terrified Job. Sometimes it’s ignorance of what we don’t understand that frightens us the most.

Verse 17 is a somewhat difficult verse to translate because the Hebrew text literally reads: “For I was not destroyed [in] the face of darkness, my face covered with deep darkness.” For comparison, the translations of several Bible versions is reproduced below:

NKJV—[Because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness and He did not hide deep darkness from my face]
KJV—[ “Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face]
NASB—[“But I am not silenced by the darkness, nor deep gloom which covers me]
NIV—[“Yet I am not silenced by the darkness, by the thick darkness that covers my face]
ESV—[“Yet I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face]
NET—[“Yet I have not been silent because of the darkness, because of the thick darkness that covered my face]

Because the Hebrew verb nitsmatiy in the first part of this verse is related to Arabic and Aramaic words that mean “to be silenced” it has been rendered in some translations as such [e.g., see above].

However, the literal meaning of the Hebrew primitive root word [tsamath (tsaw-math')] refers to being completely destroyed, to be eradicated, so as to no longer being seen [as in Job 6:17]. The word has also been properly translated as “cut-off” or “consumed”.

Thus, Job’s words seems to hearken back to his original complaint of why he had not died in the womb or at child birth [i.e., “darkness and the shadow of death”; perished and no eye had seen me”] {refer to Job 3:1-19; 10:18-19}. The following is a sampling of his complaint:
After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job spoke, and said: “May the day perish on which I was born and the night in which it was said, ‘A male child is conceived’. May that day be darkness; may God above not seek it, nor the light shine upon it. May darkness and the shadow of death claim it; may a cloud settle on it; may the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, may darkness seize it; may it not rejoice among the days of the year, may it not come into the number of the months.”—Job 3:1-6

“What is light given to him who is in misery and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they can find the grave? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden and whom God has hedged in?”—Job 3:20-23

“Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Oh, that I had perished and no eye had seen me! I would have been as though I had not been. I would have been carried from the womb to the grave.”—Job 10:18-19

Note that Job uses two different Hebrew words; “darkness” and “thick/deep darkness”:

- choshek (kho-shek’); the dark; darkness. Used to describe darkness in general; figuratively used for misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness {Job 12:25; 17:13}.

- ophel (o’fel); the darkness that comes after the sun sets; dusk. Used to describe extreme darkness; figuratively used for obscurity {Job 10:22}.

Job is perhaps using an ironic play on these words here. Since the “darkness” of death and the grave had not eradicated him before or when he was born now, having survived into adulthood only to suffer horrible physical and mental agony, an even deeper darkness covers his life and casts gloom on his understanding.

If so, it may indicate that Job still has somewhat a sense of morbid humor.
Table 23-1. The Major Themes Repeated in Job’s Responses

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Bibliography

(4) Barnes Notes,