

ACT TWO
THE DEBATE ROUND TWO
JOB 12-20

Job's discourse

Act Two opens with Job confronting his 'accusers' (chapters 12-14). In their responses Eliphaz (chapter 15), Bildad (chapter 18) and Zophar (chapter 20) add nothing to what they have already said: they continue to argue the traditional explanation of suffering. Job, on the other hand, in his initial statement (chapters 12-14), and in his responses to Eliphaz (chapters 16-17), and Bildad (chapter 19) has a lot to add to what he has said in Act One. The power of his words inspire us to look again at human suffering, especially in its relation to God, and to at least move beyond the traditional, and unsatisfactory, logic upheld by Job's 'friends'.

Job's focus is not on them. They have no new insights to offer. It is on God. Human wisdom, whether from observation of nature or from listening to tradition, fails to bring insight. If there is any meaning in the suffering of the innocent it will have to come from God. The author wants us to keep our focus there, and without the help of those who keep on repeating the traditional answer. Before directly questioning God, he wants to show up the unsatisfactory nature of the accepted position. We can learn more by listening to nature than by listening to those who are determined to sustain their theory, and show no interest in an honest exploration of the question.

In his suffering Job does not curse God (as the Satan was sure he would). Nor does he admit sin and beg for forgiveness (which the others were sure he should). He dares to ask God to give him a just hearing.

1. Job (12:1 – 14:22)

Job begins by addressing all three of his ‘advisers’.

Verses 2-3 are echoed in 13:1-2.

Verses 4-6 are heavy with sarcasm. His ‘friends’ are so sure of themselves, so sure that they know God and God’s ways. Sirach makes a similar point:

If the rich person slips, many come to the rescue; he speaks unseemly words, but they justify him. If the humble person slips, they even criticize him; he talks sense, but is not given a hearing. The rich person speaks and all are silent; they extol to the clouds what he says. The poor person speaks and they say, “Who is this fellow?” And should he stumble, they even push him down.

– Sirach 13:22-23

Qohelet agrees:

Wisdom is better than might;
yet the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.

– Ecclesiastes 9:16

Job is echoing the cry of the Psalmist:

We have had more than our fill
of the scorn of those who are
at ease, of the contempt of the
proud.

– Psalm 123:4

¹Then Job replied:

**²“How full of importance you people are.
No doubt wisdom will die with you!**

**³But I, too, have intelligence.
I am not your inferior.**

Who does not know such things as these?

**⁴I am a laughing-stock to my neighbour,
I who cry out to God expecting
an answer;
a laughing-stock, I who am innocent
and just.**

**⁵I have contempt for misfortune” –
so thinks the self-satisfied –
I despise anyone who tries to trip me up!**

**⁶There is so much peace in the tents
of the predators.,
They live tranquil lives, those who
defy God,
who hold God in the palm of their
hands.**

Truth cannot be defended by untruths

⁷Ask the animals. They will instruct you.

The birds of the sky will inform you.

⁸Ask the earth, it will teach you.

The fish of the sea will tell you.

⁹With such an abundance of teachers,
who does not know

that the hand of YHWH has done this?

¹⁰In his hand is the life of every
living thing

and the breath of every human being.

¹¹Is not the ear for discerning words,
the palate for tasting?

¹²Do the aged have wisdom?

Do those who have lived a long life
have understanding?

¹³With Him is wisdom and power;

His are counsel and understanding.

¹⁴If He tears down, no one can rebuild;
if He shuts someone in, there can be
no escape.

¹⁵If He withholds the rain,
the land dries up;

if He lets it fall, the land is inundated.

¹⁶With him are strength; what he decides
to do he does.
the deceived and the deceiver are his.

The irony continues. The ‘wisdom’ claimed by his friends is common to the animal world. Everybody knows that it is God who determines everything that happens (see Introduction pages 95-96), so it must be God who is behind Job’s suffering. This is not what Job is disputing.

Verse 9 is the only occurrence of YHWH outside the Prologue (chapters 1-2), Epilogue (42:7-17), and the theophany (38-42).

If they listened with a discerning ear to what they have been saying they would realise that it doesn’t stack up. If they bothered to taste their words they would find them insipid.

The advice they have been giving is proof that wisdom does not automatically come with years (verse 12).

In verses 13ff Job goes on to make the point that if we want to be wise we should seek wisdom at its source. His argument follows the same logic as we find from the psalmist:

He who formed the ear, does he
not hear? He who shaped the eye,
does he not see?

He who educates the nations,
does he not chastise them?

He who teaches humankind, does
he not know?

– Psalm 94:9

Behind such a statement lies the assumption that whatever happens is willed by God who controls everything for his purposes.

1Kings 22:19-24 and Ezekiel 14:9 even speak of God causing people to be deceived (verse 16).

In verses 17-25 Job is speaking of the reversal of the fortunes of the great, whom God raises up and pulls down.

**¹⁷He leads counsellors away stripped,
and makes fools of judges.**

**¹⁸He strips kings of their regal insignia,
and binds a waistcloth on their loins.**

**¹⁹He leads priests away naked,
and overthrows the mighty.**

**²⁰He deprives of speech those whose
words are trusted,
and takes away the discernment
of the elders.**

**²¹He pours contempt on princes,
and looses the belt of the strong.**

**²²He uncovers what lies hidden in the
most profound darkness,
and brings deep shadows to light.**

**²³He lifts nations up, and casts them
down;
he enlarges nations, then leads them
off into exile.**

**²⁴He strips understanding from
the leaders,
and makes them wander in a pathless
waste.**

**²⁵They grope in the dark without light;
he makes them stagger like
drunkards.**

Isaiah laughs at those who think they can hide their intentions and their actions from God:

Ha! You who hide a plan too deep
for YHWH, whose deeds are in the
dark, and who say, "Who sees us?
Who knows us?"

– Isaiah 29:15

¹Look, my eye has seen all this,
my ear has heard and understood it.
²What you know, I also know;
I am not your inferior.
³But I would speak to the Almighty,
and I desire to argue my case with God.

⁴As for you, you whitewash with lies;
all of you are worthless physicians.
⁵If you would only keep silent,
that would be your wisdom!

⁶Hear now my defence,
and listen to the reasoning from my lips.
⁷Or perhaps you would try to defend God
with untruths and injustices?
⁸Will you show partiality toward him,
will you plead the case for God?

⁹Will it go well with you when he
searches you out?
Or will you try to deceive him,
as one deceives a human being?
¹⁰He will surely declare you guilty
if in secret you show partiality.
¹¹Will not his majesty terrify you,
and the dread of him fall upon you?

¹²Your maxims are proverbs of ashes,
your responses are of clay.

¹³“Let me have silence, and I will speak,
come what may.

Verses 1-2 repeat 12:3 and conclude the first point of Job’s argument.

In verse 3 Job declares his intention to direct his words to God. His language is that of the courtroom. From the opening two chapters we know that God is listening and observing all that is going on.

Job is not going to hide behind silence (verse 5) and he rightly rejects a defence of God that relies on untruths and issues in an unjust verdict (verse 7).

Before pleading his case with God Job has more he wants to say to his friends (verses 6-19).

Even though he is arguing with God he is relating to the only one who can save him (verse 16).

From verse 20 Job addresses God directly.

Later, Elihu will quote verse 21 against Job (see 33:7).

Job does not mind what role God takes, so long as he agrees to argue the matter in court (verse 22).

The Psalmist, too, prays to God not to 'hide your face' (verse 24):

Answer me quickly, YHWH;
my spirit fails. Do not hide
your face from me.

– Psalm 143:7

The Psalmist also prays:

If you, YHWH, should mark
iniquities, Lord, who could
stand?

– Psalm 130:3

Surely the sins of his youth, which Job admits, were not such as to merit his present suffering (verse 26).

Elihu will quote verse 27 against Job (see 33:11).

**¹⁴I will risk everything,
I will wager life itself.**

**¹⁵Even if he chooses to kill me I am prepared.
I will defend myself to his face.**

**¹⁶This will be my salvation.
Let the godless shun his presence, not I.**

**¹⁷Listen carefully to my words,
be attentive to my argument.**

**¹⁸I have prepared my case;
I know I will be found innocent.**

**¹⁹Only let me meet my accuser!
Why must I die unheard?**

**²⁰Grant me these two things,
if I am to face you openly:**

**²¹withdraw your chastising hand from me,
and do not let dread of you terrify me.**

**²²Then make your accusation,
and I will answer;
or let me speak, and you reply to me.**

**²³What are all my iniquities and my sins?
Make me know my transgression
and my sin.**

**²⁴Why do you hide your face,
and treat me as though I were your enemy?**

**²⁵Will you frighten a windblown leaf
and pursue dry chaff?**

**²⁶List against me any acts of rebellion;
include the iniquities of my youth.**

**²⁷Shackle my feet, and watch me
wherever I go;
track my footprints.**

**²⁸I am no better than rotting carrion,
than a garment that is moth-eaten.**

What is there to hope for?

- ¹A mortal, born of woman,
few of days and full of trouble,
²blossoms like a flower and withers,
flees like a shadow and does not last.
³Do you fix your eyes on such a one?
Do you bring me into judgment
with you?
- ⁴Who can bring a clean thing out of
an unclean?
No one can.
- ⁵Since the days you have appointed for us
are determined,
and the number of our months is
known to you,
and you have appointed the bounds
that we cannot pass,
⁶look away from us, and leave us alone,
that we may enjoy, like labourers,
our days.
- ⁷For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
and that it will go on sending out shoots.
⁸Even though its roots grows old
in the earth,
and its stump dies in the ground,
⁹yet at the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a
young plant.
¹⁰But mortals die, and are laid low;
humans expire, and where are they?
- ¹¹The waters of a lake evaporate,
a river wastes away and dries up.
¹²Mortals lie down and do not rise again;
until the heavens are no more,
they will not awake
or be roused out of their sleep.

In verses 1-12 Job laments what it means to be a human being (see 7:6-21; 8:9; 10:21-22).

For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh ... their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

– Psalm 90:9-10

My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

– Psalm 102:11

YHWH, what are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them? They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow.

– Psalm 144:3-4

Who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow?

– Ecclesiastes 8:9

Does the One who made man the way he is have the right to judge him when he behaves accordingly?

Why can't we rest from our labour, as God rests, and not be constantly hounded by God?

When trees are cut down they can renew themselves. When human beings are cut down in death, there is no renewal (see Introduction pages 96-98).

In verse 13-15 Job says that if death was not the end of life he could patiently bear his suffering. Since there is no life beyond death there is nothing to hope for.

This echoes the words of Qohelet:

Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in the grave, to which you are going.

– Ecclesiastes 9:10

The author imagines death in much the same way as the Psalmist who speaks of

those forsaken among the dead, the slain that lie in the grave, those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.

– Psalm 88:5

Job had hope once, but God has worn him down, just as ‘torrents wash away the soil’ (verse 19).

¹³Oh that the grave were a hiding-place where you concealed me until your wrath is past, and that you would set a time when you would remember me again!

¹⁴If only the dead might live again! Then I would willingly wait out the time of my servitude until I was relieved at my post.

¹⁵You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands.

¹⁶Well then, keep a record of every step I take but don't keep on noting my faults.

¹⁷Seal up every transgression of mine in a casket, and white out the memory of every wrong-doing.

¹⁸A mountain falls and crumbles away, a rock is dislodged from its place;

¹⁹water wears away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil; so you destroy the hope of mortals.

²⁰You prevail against man, and he passes away for ever; his countenance loses its colour, and he is gone.

²¹His children grow rich, and he knows nothing of it; they are brought low, and he is none the wiser.

²²All he feels is the pain that racks his body, and the grief that afflicts his soul."

2. Eliphaz's Second Discourse (15:1-35)

¹Then Eliphaz from Teman answered:

**²“Is this how a wise man speaks,
with false knowledge,
puffed up with the east wind,
³arguing with inconsistent reasoning,
in words that make no sense?**

**⁴You are doing away with the fear
of God,
and undermining prayer.**

**⁵It is your sinfulness that moves
your tongue.
How cleverly you twist words.**

**⁶Your own mouth condemns you,
not I;
your own lips testify against you.**

**⁷Are you the firstborn of the human
race?
Were you brought forth before
the hills?**

**⁸Have you overheard the council
of God?
Do you claim to be the only one
with wisdom?**

**⁹What do you know that we do not
know?
What do you understand that is not
clear to us?**

**¹⁰The gray-haired and the aged are
on our side,
those older than your father.**

**¹¹Do you have no regard for the
consolations of God,
or the word that deals gently
with you?**

Eliphaz drops any attempt to be conciliatory and launches into a personal attack. He ‘knows’ that Job is being punished for sin, and is appalled that Job not only refuses to admit that, but that he speaks in such a blasphemous way. Eliphaz is warning Job of the consequences of ignoring human wisdom and of being so disrespectful to God. Human beings have no right to question God. Note that Eliphaz makes no advance in the argument. He just expresses his outrage at what he sees as Job’s folly and pride.

Instead of his words issuing from informed judgment, Job’s words, according to Eliphaz, burst out from an inside inflated by the dry, devastating east wind blowing in from the lifeless desert (verse 2). Job’s words are high on heat but lack any indication of enlightenment; they are full of passion but lack reason: a lot of hot air.

Job’s lack of humility and failure to beg for forgiveness show how lacking he is in the virtue of religion (verse 4). Job’s clever use of words is an attempt to hide his feelings of guilt (verses 5-6).

It is wisdom, not Job, who was present at the beginning of God’s creation (verse 7; see Proverbs 8:22-36; Sirach 1:4; 25:9)

In verse 9 Eliphaz turns Job’s words of 13:2 against him.

Eliphaz is offended at Job’s denying the connection between age and wisdom (see 12:12).

Eliphaz and the others have tried to console Job (compare Psalm 94:19), and have spoken gently to him. Since he has taken no notice, Eliphaz feels the need (for Job’s good) to speak to him in more threatening words.

Job's feelings are so irrational that he can't see straight or think straight. This is clear (to Eliphaz) from Job's foolish outbursts.

In verse 14 Eliphaz is repeating ideas already found in 4:17-19.

Job is failing to recognise the limits of being human. In the words of the Psalmist:

They have all gone astray,
they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does
good, no, not one.

– Psalm 14:3

In failing to recognise his limits, Job is demonstrating that he is less than human, being 'detestable and corrupt' (verse 16).

In verses 17-35 Eliphaz develops his favourite theme: the fate of the wicked.

It is not clear to what 'land' Eliphaz is referring in verse 19.

From verse 20 Eliphaz offers a psychological sketch of a certain kind of human being who suffers the consequences of his evil ways. Eliphaz is making the point that crime does not pay and that a man cannot get away with unjust or irreligious behaviour.

Eliphaz is suggesting that Job's rebellion is an attack on God (verse 25).

¹²How passion carries you away.

Your eyes dart this way and that!

**¹³In your anger you lash out against God,
uttering such protests with your mouth.**

**¹⁴What are mortals, that they can be clean?
Or those born of woman, that they
can be innocent?**

**¹⁵God does not find even his angels faithful,
and the heavens are not clean in his sight;**

**¹⁶how much less a human being who is
detestable and corrupt,
one who drinks iniquity like water!**

**¹⁷Listen to me, I would speak with you,
tell you what I have seen,**

**¹⁸what the wise openly proclaim,
having listened to their own ancestors,**

**¹⁹to whom alone was this land given,
and no stranger passed among them.**

**²⁰The wicked pass their life in torment,
few are the years assigned to the oppressor.**

**²¹Everything they hear fills them with fear;
when things seem peaceful the destroyer
comes upon them.**

**²²They despair of escaping from darkness;
they are destined for the sword.**

**²³They wander abroad for bread, saying,
'Where is it?'**

They know that catastrophe is imminent;

**²⁴distress and anguish terrorise them;
they are in the grip of anguish and turmoil,
like a king thrust into battle.**

**²⁵Because they raised their hand against God,
and defied the Almighty,**

**²⁶running stubbornly against him,
head held high**

behind a thick-bossed shield;

**²⁷because they have covered their faces
with oil,**

and in their arrogance are obese,

**²⁸they will live in abandoned cities,
in houses that threaten collapse.**

The inevitable consequences of living an evil life

²⁹**No longer will they be rich, their fortune
will not endure;
their wealth will not go with them
into the grave;**

³⁰**they will not escape from darkness;
the flame will dry up their shoots,
and their flower will be swept away
by the wind.**

³¹**Let them not trust in emptiness,
deceiving themselves;
for emptiness will be their recompense.**

³²**It will be paid in full before their time,
and their branches will never green.**

³³**They will shake off their unripe grape,
like the vine,
and cast off their blossoms,
like the olive tree.**

³⁴**For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of those
who receive bribes.**

³⁵**They conceive mischief and are
pregnant with evil;
their womb prepares to give birth to
delusion."**

We find the same image in Psalm
7:14

They conceive evil, and are
pregnant with mischief, and
bring forth lies.

In the Newer Testament, James 1:14-
15 also uses this image:

One is tempted by one's own
desire, being lured and enticed
by it; then, when that desire has
conceived, it is sin that it bears,
and when sin has reached full
term, it gives birth to death.

3. Job (16:1 – 17:16)

Job has been subjected already to four long discourses from his ‘miserable comforters’ who continue to repeat the traditional ‘wisdom’ on the subject of punishment, but who are not listening to Job and have no interest in examining the facts. Job has had enough!

Job is suggesting that they should put themselves in his situation and stop being satisfied with words and gestures of apparent compassion from the outside as it were.

Verses 6-14 take the form of a lamentation.

The ‘you’ in verse 7 could be Eliphaz. It could be God. Job’s suffering should have aroused genuine compassion from his companions. Instead they have turned it into evidence that he has sinned and therefore that God is punishing him.

That this was a common understanding of suffering is borne out from the following psalms:

My iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy
for me. I am utterly bowed down and
prostrate; all day long I go around
mourning. I confess my iniquity; I am
sorry for my sin.

– Psalm 38:4, 6, 18

YHWH, let me know my end, and what
is the measure of my days; let me know
how fleeting my life is. I am silent; I
do not open my mouth, for it is you
who have done it. You chastise mortal
human beings in punishment for sin,
consuming like a moth what is dear to
them; surely everyone is no more than
a breath.

– Psalm 39:4, 9, 11)

¹Then Job answered:

**²“I have already heard an infinity
of such things;
miserable comforters are you all.**

**³Is there no end to words that are
nothing but wind?
What provokes you to keep on
talking?**

**⁴Would I talk as you do,
if we swapped places?
Would I pile up words against you,
and shake my head at you?**

**⁵Would I offer you words of comfort,
with lips trembling with
compassion?**

**⁶If I speak, my pain is not assuaged,
and if I am silent, it does not
leave me,**

**⁷till finally I am exhausted.
You discard my testimony and
torment me.**

**⁸My suffering rises up to witness
against me,
and accuses me to my face.
assailed me like a warrior.**

Why is God treating him like this?

- ⁹God's fury assails me and
rips me apart,
teeth are gnashed against me;
hostile eyes glare at me.
- ¹⁰They have opened their mouths
against me;
insolently they strike out at me,
they mass themselves together
against me.
- ¹¹God consigns me to the wicked,
casts me into the hands of criminals.
- ¹²I was at ease, and he broke me in two;
he seized me by the neck and
dashed me to pieces;
he set me up as his target;
- ¹³his archers surround me.
He slashed open my stomach,
and showed no mercy;
he poured out my gall on the ground.
- ¹⁴He broke through my defences
again and again.
He attacked me like a man of war.
- ¹⁵I have sewn sackcloth over my skin,
and have laid my pride in the dust.
- ¹⁶My face is red with weeping,
and deep darkness covers my eyelids,
- ¹⁷though there is no violence
in my hands,
and my prayer is sincere.
- ¹⁸O earth, do not ignore my blood;
do not come between me and my
request for justice.
- ¹⁹For even now my witness is in
heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.
- ²⁰My friends scorn me;
my eye pours out tears to God,
- ²¹that he would maintain the right of
a mortal with God,
as well as with man.
- ²²For when a few years have passed,
I shall go the way from which there is
no return.

We might compare the following:

The voice of the enemy terrifies
me, the cry of the wicked. They
overwhelm me with misfortune.
They attack me with fury.

– Psalm 55:4

Cruelly they mock me, gnashing
their teeth at me.

– Psalm 35:16

The wicked plot against the right-
eous, gnashing their teeth at them.

– Psalm 37:12

Job cannot understand why God is treating him as an enemy. Instead of choosing true comforters to feel with him in his suffering, God has chosen these 'comforters' who can only accuse him and threaten him. Why?

God is the commander. His archers are targeting Job (verses 12-13; see 6:4). God is a hunter who has captured his prey and is violently disposing of it. In verse 14 he is likened to an army attacking a city, wave after wave, and breaching its walls.

Job is at the end of his strength, utterly humiliated and close to death. There is nothing he can do about it, except insist, as he does in verse 17, on his innocence. Job is clear: his situation is not one of repentance, but of incomprehension and desperation.

Job cannot understand why he is suffering the way he is. He wants the earth to cry to God to avenge his innocent blood (verse 18). Those around him are accusing him falsely. However, God must know that he is innocent. If God does not act quickly, Job's premature death will appear to prove his 'comforters' right. That would be a further injustice!

Job goes on to describe his tragic situation. His suffering is compounded by the foolishness of his self-appointed ‘comforters’ who continue to harass him.

Job looks to God to side with him, and not to allow the injustice of having those who harass him have the last word.

The translation of verse 5 is an attempt to guess at the meaning of the Hebrew text.

Job continues to describe his situation. ‘He’ in verse 6 is God.

Verse 9 appears to be out of place. It doesn’t sound like Job.

Job’s ‘comforters’ claim wisdom, but lack it. As Isaiah says:

Woe to you who are wise in your own eyes, and shrewd in your own estimation.

– Isaiah 5:21

Job sees no prospect of hope (verses 11-16). The Psalmist prays:

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night.”

– Psalm 139:8,11

**¹My mind is dark,
my days are spent,
the grave awaits me.**

**²Only fools accompany me,
I have had my fill of harassment.**

**³Give me a guarantee that you yourself
are with me;
who, otherwise, is there that will go
surety for me?**

**⁴Since you have closed their minds
to understanding,
therefore you will not let them prevail.**

**⁵What’s the point in their denouncing a
friend to defraud him?
Their children will get nothing out of it!**

**⁶He has made me a byword of the peoples,
and I am one in whose face people spit.**

**⁷My eye has grown dim from grief,
my whole frame has wasted away.**

**⁸The upright are appalled to see it,
and the innocent stir themselves up
against the godless.**

**⁹Yet the righteous hold to their way,
and they that have clean hands grow
stronger and stronger.**

**¹⁰Come back now, all of you,
and I shall not find a sensible person
among you.**

**¹¹My days are in decline, my plans have
come to nothing.**

**The anxieties of my heart
¹²make me long for the day,
as through the hours of darkness
I await the dawn.**

**¹³What am I waiting for? Sheol is my home,
I spread out my couch in the darkness,**

**¹⁴I say to the Pit, ‘You are my father,’
and to the worm, ‘My mother,’ or ‘My sister.’**

**¹⁵Where then is my hope?
My hope ... has anyone seen it?**

**¹⁶I will go down to the gates of Sheol
when we all descend together into the dust.”**

4. Bildad's Second discourse (18:1-21)

- ¹Then Bildad the Shuhite answered:**
**²“When are you going to stop setting
snares with empty words?
Be sensible, and then we can speak.**
**³Why are we counted as cattle?
Why are we deemed stupid in your eyes?**
**⁴You who eat yourself up with your anger
— perhaps the earth will be depopulated
because of you,
or the rock be moved from its place?**
- ⁵Surely the light of the wicked is put out,
and the flame from their hearth
no longer shines.**
**⁶Darkness shall cover their tent,
and the lamp that shone there will shine
no more.**
**⁷Their self-confident steps trip them up,
and their own schemes backfire.**
**⁸For they are tangled in a net by their own
feet,
as they make their way through the
undergrowth.**
**⁹A trap seizes them by the heel;
a snare locks in on them.**
**¹⁰There are ropes hidden on the ground,
and pit-falls on their path.**
**¹¹Chilling nightmares frighten them
on every side,
they can't escape them.**
**¹²The Ravenous One confronts them,
and disgrace follows hard on their heels.**
**¹³By disease their skin is consumed,
the forerunner of death consumes
their limbs.**
**¹⁴They are torn from the peace of their
tent,
and are brought before the King of
Terrors.**

Since Job has failed to respond to encouragement, Bildad has recourse to threats, seemingly oblivious of the fact that Job could hardly suffer more than he is already suffering.

Bildad is accusing Job of the pride of thinking that the divine order of things will be altered just to suit him. Bildad is convinced that suffering is a proof of sin. Job is challenging that. All he will do is destroy himself.

In verses 5-6 Bildad describes what happens to those who challenge divine order. The fire in the family hearth was a source of light and heat for the home and for much else in the life of the family.

In verses 7-10 Bildad speaks of the hunt in which Job ends up catching himself in the snares he has laid.

The terrors that Job will experience here will give way to the worse terrors of Death ('the Ravenous One', verse 12).

The King of Terrors (verse 14) is Death, whose reign is final, universal and complete.

Death shall be their shepherd;
straight to the grave they
descend, and their form shall
waste away; Sheol shall be
their home.

– Psalm 49:14

Job's self-destructive pride and folly will mean that even after death there is no hope for him: everything is destroyed, he himself is forgotten and there is no one to carry on after him.

Bildad is carried away by his own rhetoric and abstract generalisations. He misses the mark, for we know that Job is not ungodly and that he does recognise God.

**¹⁵Fire takes hold in their tent
and sulfur covers their abode.**

**¹⁶Their roots dry up beneath,
and their branches wither above.**

**¹⁷Their memory perishes from the earth,
and their name is everywhere forgotten.**

**¹⁸They are thrust from light into darkness,
and exiled from the world.**

**¹⁹They have no offspring or descendant
among their people,
and no survivor where they used to live.**

**²⁰Those of the west are appalled at their
fate,**

and horror seizes those of the east:

**²¹“Surely such is the dwelling of the
ungodly,**

**such is the place of those who
do not recognise God.”**

5. Job (19:1-29)

¹Then Job answered:

**²“How long will you torment me,
and crush me with words?**

**³These ten times you have cast
reproach upon me,
and insulted me without shame.**

**⁴If I have committed an error,
it is up to me to deal with it.**

**⁵It is not for you to chant a
victory song over me,
casting my shame in my face.**

**⁶Well then, know that God has put
me in the wrong,
and closed his net around me.**

**⁷I cry out ‘Violence!’ No one
answers;
I call for help, and no one
comes to my defence.**

**⁸He has walled up my way so that
I cannot escape,
and he has hidden my path
in darkness.**

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

**¹⁰He leaves me defenceless on every
side, and I must go;
he has uprooted my hope
like a tree.**

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

**¹²His motley band advances
together;
they throw up siegeworks
against me,
and encamp around my tent.**

God is not striking Job down to prove the theory of Job’s advisers. On the contrary, by striking down an innocent man God is showing up the error of their argument.

Bildad (see 8:3) sees as blasphemous Job’s accusation in verse 6 that God would act unjustly.

In a similar vein to verse 7 Habakkuk:

YHWH, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not listen? Or cry to you
“Violence!” and you will not save?

– Habakkuk 1:2

Also Lamentations:

Though I call and cry for help, he
shuts out my prayer.

– Lamentation 3:8

The difference is that in verse 7, it is God who is inflicting the violence, and Job is crying out to others to rescue him from God!

Verse 8 compare Lamentations 3:2,7,9.

Verse 9 compare:

You have made man a little lower than
God, and crowned him with glory and
honour.

– Psalm 8:5

Verse 10 compare

YHWH has destroyed without mercy
all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath
he has broken down the strongholds of
daughter Judah; he has brought down
to the ground in dishonour the king-
dom and its rulers. He has cut down in
fierce anger all the might of Israel.

– Lamentations 2:2-3

Verses 13-20 list details of Job's suffering, especially his social isolation and the loss of all dignity and honour.

On verses 13-14 compare:

My friends and companions
stand aloof from my affliction,
and my neighbours stand far
off.

– Psalm 38:11

You have put me in the depths
of the Pit, in the regions dark
and deep. Your wrath lies heavy
upon me, and you overwhelm
me with all your waves. You
have caused my companions
to shun me; you have made me
a thing of horror to them. I am
shut in so that I cannot escape.

– Psalm 88:6-8

Verses 21-22 are unusual in that God is portrayed as the enemy and the supplicant is seeking mercy from those around him. In Biblical prayers it is customarily the reverse. As Paul says: 'If God is for us who can be against?' (Romans 8:31).

Receiving no pity from his contemporaries, Job hopes that posterity will treat him better. To that end he wishes that his situation could be impressed into metal or etched on stone. Compare Isaiah:

Go now, write it before them
on a tablet, and inscribe it in
a book, so that it may be for
the time to come as a witness
forever.

– Isaiah 30:8

**¹³My family distance themselves from me,
and my relatives are estranged from me,**

**¹⁴neighbours and acquaintances
abandon me;**

**¹⁵the guests in my house have
forgotten me;**

**my serving girls treat me as a stranger,
for them I am someone they do not
know.**

**¹⁶I call to my servant, but he gives me
no answer,**

and finally I have to plead with him.

**¹⁷My breath is repulsive to my wife;
I am loathsome to my own children.**

**¹⁸Even the urchins in the street
despise me,**

as soon as I appear they insult me.

**¹⁹All my intimate friends abhor me,
and those whom I loved have
turned against me.**

²⁰My bones cling to my skin,

I am surviving by the skin of my teeth.

²¹Have pity on me, have pity on me,

**O you my friends,
for the hand of God has come down
upon me!**

**²²Why do you, like God, pursue me,
and never tire of sneering at me?**

²³If only my words were written down!

If only they were impressed into metal,

²⁴with an iron scalpel, and with lead

they were engraved on a rock forever!

Job asserts his trust

Unfortunately verses 25-27 are among the most poorly conserved verses in Job. The Greek Septuagint Version is difficult. The Latin Vulgate is clear but does not represent the meaning of the Hebrew. Christian interpretation liked to find here an expression of faith in the resurrection of the body and interpreted Job accordingly. Too many verses in Job exclude faith in a personal resurrection (see Introduction 96-98) for these verses to be interpreted in this way.

25^{I know that my Redeemer lives,}

In his commentary on Job page 146, Marvin Pope writes:

The term *gô'el* designates the nearest kinsman who was obligated to exact vengeance in a blood feud (Deut 19:6-12; 2Sam 14:11) or otherwise look after the interests of his kinsman by redeeming him from slavery (Lev 25:48) or regaining the family property (Lev 25:25), including the deceased person's widow in order to provide him an heir by proxy (Ruth 4:4-6)

By 'redeemer' Job may be referring to an intercessor who would plead his cause before God (see 9:33; 16:19). From one angle, since God is the one who has put Job in this life-threatening situation, one might expect Job to be speaking of a vindicator who would take his side *against* God (and against those who are oppressing him). However it seems more likely that he is referring to God (compare Psalm 19:14) whom he sees as both the one responsible for oppressing him and the one who will vindicate him.

and that at the last he will rise up above the dust:

Death will not have the last word. God will rise above the dust of the tomb and declare what is true.

26^{after my skin has been destroyed, then without flesh I will see God;}

Once again Job is asserting his innocence. He is wasting away, but knows that he is in communion with God and that this will be seen, if not now, then after his death (verse 26). The Psalmist prays:

YHWH is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

– Psalm 11:7

27^{I myself shall see him, and not as a stranger, my own eyes shall see him.}

I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

– Psalm 63:2

My heart faints in my breast!

Those who see Job in his humiliation see one who is an enemy (*šar*) of God. Job asserts that he is neither an enemy, nor even a stranger (*zar*). Job knows that, though everyone abandon him, ultimately it will be seen that God has not abandoned him.

The conflict of emotions that Job is experiencing is enough to break his heart. It is too much to hold.

Job concludes by turning on his oppressors. They think that they are siding with God in torturing Job. They must beware, for they will be judged for what they are doing.

**²⁸If you say, 'How will
we go about torturing
Him?' – in this way
finding the root of the
problem in me –**

**²⁹beware of the sword,
for crimes demand
the sword,
and know that there is
a judgment.**

6. Zophar's Second Discourse (20:1-29)

- ¹Then Zophar from Naamat spoke:
²My agitation stirs me to respond.
I feel disturbed.
³I have heard a lecture that insults me,
and a voice in my heart makes me
contest it.
⁴Do you not know that it has always
been the case,
ever since human beings were placed
on earth,
⁵that the exulting of the wicked
doesn't last,
and the joy of the godless is but for
a moment?
⁶Even though their ambition mounts up
as high as the heavens,
and their head reaches to the clouds,
⁷they will perish like their own faeces.
Those who have seen them will ask,
'Where are they?'
⁸They will fly away like a dream,
nowhere to be found;
they will vanish like a vision of the
night.
⁹The eyes that saw them will see them
no more,
nor will their dwelling behold them
any more.
¹⁰Their children will beg like the poor,
in an effort to restore their fortune.
¹¹Their bodies, still full of youth,
will lie down in the dust with them.
¹²Though wickedness tastes sweet in
their mouth,
though they hold it under their tongues,
¹³though they are loath to let it go,
anxious not to lose the pleasure of
their palate,
¹⁴yet in their stomachs their food is
turned into the venom of the viper.**

Zophar has taken in nothing of what Job has said. He is utterly confident in his conviction that Job's suffering, coming as it must from a just God, is proof that Job is evil and is being rightly punished. Job's claim of innocence deeply offends Zophar, for, within the limits of his theology, it involves an accusation against God of the injustice of punishing the innocent.

In verse 6 we are reminded of the myth of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), and of the hubris of the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:13), the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:2) and the pharaoh of Egypt (Ezekiel 31:10). The psalmist writes:

I have seen the wicked oppressing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. Again I passed by, and they were no more; I sought them, but they could not be found.

– Psalm 37:35

The proud carry within themselves the cause of their own downfall.

It was traditional 'wisdom' that the lot of the wicked is a premature death (see Psalm 55:23).

Job's attempt to gain time by indulging in his own defence will get him nowhere. The words he is enjoying will soon tell against him.

We recall the words of Jeremiah:

I will punish Bel in Babylon, and
make him disgorge what he has
swallowed. The nations shall no
longer stream to him; the wall of
Babylon has fallen.

– Jeremiah 51:44

If the mighty empires poisoned them-
selves by their own greed, Job had
better repent of his wickedness before
it is too late.

Thunder and lightning are seen as ex-
pressions of divine anger:

On the wicked he will rain coals of
fire and sulphur; a scorching wind
shall be the portion of their cup.

– Psalm 11:6

The appetite of the wicked is such that
they can never fill their belly. God's
anger will fill it for them!

- 15**They swallow down riches only to
vomit them up again;
for God casts them out of their bellies.
- 16**The juices they sucked are the poison
of asps;
the tongue of a viper will strike them.
- 17**No longer will they enjoy the sight
of rivers of oil,
torrents of milk and honey.
- 18**The fruit of their toil will be returned,
unused,
and they will get no profit from their
trading;
- 19**For they have defrauded and
abandoned the poor,
and have seized houses that they
did not build.
- 20**Because they knew not how to limit
their greed,
they will salvage none of their
treasures.
- 21**Since no one escaped their insatiable
appetite,
their prosperity will not endure.
- 22**Having once lived in luxury, they will
fall into poverty;
all the force of misery will come
upon them.
- 23**To fill their belly to the full
He will send his fierce anger
into them,
and rain it upon them as their food.
- 24**If they flee from an iron weapon,
a bronze arrow will strike them
through.
- 25**It is drawn forth and comes out of
their body,
and the glittering point comes out of
their gall;
terrors come upon them.

God's judgment on the wicked

**²⁶Utter darkness is laid up for their treasures;
a fire fanned by no one will devour them;
what is left in their tent will be consumed.**

**²⁷The heavens will reveal their guilt,
the earth will rise up against them.**

**²⁸The possessions of their house will be carried off in a flood,
dragged off in the day of wrath.**

**²⁹This is the lot reserved by God for the wicked,
the heritage decreed for them by God."**

'Darkness' is associated with divine judgment. One thinks also of the darkness of the grave – the final end for the wicked.

The 'fire'(verse 26) is the instrument of God.

Heaven and earth witness against the wicked, who have nowhere to hide.

We recall the words of Zephaniah:

That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

– Zephaniah 1:15

We read in Sirach:

Fire and hail and famine and pestilence, all these have been created for vengeance; the fangs of wild animals and scorpions and vipers, and the sword that punishes the ungodly with destruction. They take delight in doing his bidding, always ready for his service on earth; and when their time comes they never disobey his command.

– Sirach 39:29-31