

Job 6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Job chapter 6. Then Job answered and said, Oh, that my vexation were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances, for then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea. Therefore my words have been rash, for the arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks their poison, the terrors of God are arrayed against me. Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass, or the ox low over his fodder? Can that which is tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the juice of the mallow? My appetite refuses to touch them, they are as food that is loathsome to me. Oh, that I might have my request, and that God would fulfil my hope, that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off. This would be my comfort, I would even exult in pain unsparing, for I have not denied the words of the Holy One. What is my strength, that I should wait, and what is my end, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze? Have I any help in me, when resource is driven from me? He who withholds kindness from a friend, forsakes the fear of the

Almighty. My brothers are treacherous as a torrent bed, as torrential streams that pass away, which are dark with ice, and where the snow hides itself. When they melt, they disappear. When it is hot, they vanish from their place. The caravans turn aside from their course. They go up into the waste and perish. The caravans of Timur look. The travellers of Sheba hope. They are ashamed, because they were confident.

They come there, and are disappointed. For you have now become nothing. You see my calamity, and are afraid. Have I said, make me a gift, or from your wealth offer a bribe for me, or deliver me from the adversary's hand, or redeem me from the hand of the ruthless? Teach me, and I will be silent. Make me understand how I have gone astray. How forceful are upright words. But what does reproof from you reprove? Do you think that you can reprove words when the speech of a despairing man is wind? You would even cast lots over the fatherless, and bargain over your friend. But now be pleased to look at me, for I will not lie to your face. Please turn, let no injustice be done. Turn now, my vindication is at stake. Is there any injustice on my tongue? Cannot my palate discern the cause of calamity?

There are three cycles of dialogues in the book of Job. They start with Eliphaz, go to Bildad, and then end with Zophar. Each one of the friend's speeches is punctuated by a response from Job, typically longer than the speech of the friend. The first speech is by Eliphaz the Temanite, and that ends at the end of chapter 5. Job's response begins here, in chapter 6. He begins his response in a way that probably harkens back to his curse and lament in chapter 3. Comparing his vexation or grief to all of the sand of the sea, he tries to explain why he has spoken as he has.

Is it at all surprising that a person who has experienced such intense suffering and anguish should speak in such a distressed manner? Surely this is exactly what we would expect from someone in such a position. If only Job's anguish had an objective measurement, it would be amply evident to everyone else too that his response was proportionate. In verse 4 he speaks to the fact that he has been struck by the arrows of the Lord. God's poisoned arrows have struck him, and their poison is going through his system. He is also besieged by the terrors of the Lord. The way that Job describes his suffering, it seems to be focused more upon the present time, not just the events in the past.

[3 : 48] His sense of the disloyalty of his friends, and of the cruel injustice of the implicit accusation of Eliphaz's speech hurts him most painfully, as we shall soon see. Job compares his response to the way that a donkey will bray when he is denied what is fitting to him. When the donkey has grass, he doesn't bray in protest, nor does the ox low when he receives his expected food. Job has been served a plate of suffering that is utterly unfitting to him, and quite inedible. Is he not permitted to bray in such circumstances? Contrary to the claims of Eliphaz, this is not something that's happening to Job. As a result of Job's own sinfulness, Job has every right to protest. In verse 8, Job finally makes his own request. Rather than prolonging his meaningless suffering, he wishes that the Lord would simply cut him off. Why wound him so grievously, yet hold his hand back from the finishing blow?

Does the Lord expect that Job can hold out in this situation? It's not that he's afraid of the pain. Rather, he fears that his grip upon his integrity will loosen. His wife has tempted him to curse God and die. He wants to die in order that he would not curse God. He does not want to find himself tested beyond his limits, and he feels that he has already reached those limits. What reserves of strength is the Lord expecting him to draw upon at this point? Is he as unyielding a stone or bronze that he should be able to endure such hardship? Every ounce of his strength and resolve seems to have been wrung out of him, and with terror he feels himself approaching the point where his righteousness might also forsake him. In verse 14 onwards, he takes an accusatory posture towards his friends. The exact sense of verse 14 is difficult to ascertain. What exactly is the relationship that Job is drawing between the fear of the Almighty and kindness shown towards a friend? It's clear enough that he is accusing his friends of disloyalty, and it seems likely that he's associating such loyalty quite closely with the fear of the Almighty. If they truly feared God, they would not treat their friend in such a treacherous manner. Job goes on to develop an extended metaphor. He compares his friends to a wadi in the desert. Such a wadi would bear the torrents of the melt waters, as the snows on the mountains melted. But then, having borne those torrents, they would dry up, leaving only dry channels in the summer heat. He imagines a travelling caravan of nomads or traders, turning aside to go to the place where they expected to find water, only to find a dry course where they had hoped to find the waters of the wadi. This, of course, could prove fatal, as they might not be able to get to the next site of water before dying of thirst. Job's friends are very similar to this. They're fair weather friends. When he has a desperate need for their aid, they offer no relief. It isn't that Job has made some unreasonable demand of them. He hasn't asked for a substantial loan, or for military aid, or for deliverance from some oppressor. Eliphaz, while acknowledging that Job is generally a righteous man, had suggested that Job is suffering because of some fault on his part. As a sinful human being, dealing with the entirely holy

God, there are plenty of grounds for God to inflict such suffering upon Job. It must be justified. Yet Job protests. He's prepared to listen if they'll only tell him what exactly it is that he has done wrong. A true rebuke would be devastating, but they've offered nothing of the kind. They should pay attention to and reckon with his words, rather than simply dismissing them as hot air. They are so heartless that they are like those who would cast lots over an orphan to sell them into slavery. They're treating him and his distress in a very similar manner. They've come in like vultures. Satan is the great adversary and accuser, but they are proving his willing helpers. They've failed properly to acknowledge him to this point. They've ignored him. They've spent seven days not talking to him. Now, when they have broken their silence, all they have to offer are hard words. They won't actually deal with him as a friend.

Job wants them to look him in the eye, to deal with him candidly and forthrightly. This really matters to him. His vindication is at stake. If they are going to claim that he is unjust, make their case.

Deal with his arguments. They should not delude themselves in thinking that generalities taken from some schoolbook will suffice to answer his position. Job insists that he, the sufferer, has some understanding of the nature of his suffering. Cannot his palate discern the cause of calamity? Why shouldn't they listen to him and deal with his perspective fairly?

[8 : 26] A question to consider, how does Job's position in verses 8 to 13 differ from that of a suicidal person?