

JOB

Chapter 23

Job Replies: Where Is God?

Then Job answered and said: 2 “Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. 3 Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! 4 I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. 5 I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. 6 Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. 7 There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. 8 “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; 9 on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. 10 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. 11 My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have 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 portion of food. 13 But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. 14 For he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind. 15 Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. 16 God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; 17 yet I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face.

3:2 *my hand is heavy*. Dagon’s broken hand lay on the ground (v. 4), but the Lord shows the reality and strength of his own hand by bringing a plague (see note on 6:4) on the people of Ashdod and the surrounding area (see vv. 9, 11). God would not be manipulated by his own people (see note on 4:3), nor would he permit the Philistines to think that their victory over the Israelites and the capture of the ark demonstrated the superiority of their god over the God of Israel.) (CSB)

Job’s agony tempts him to lose self-control, and he must discipline himself to keep himself in check. Cf 1Co 1:27. (TLSB)

23:3 *where I might find him*. The heavenly Father, who allowed Job to suffer in this way. Cf 1:6–12. (TLSB)

seat! God’s judgment throne. (TLSB)

23:4 *arguments*. Job envisions a court scene in which he could present his case to God. See p 792. When God later gives Job opportunity to speak (40:1–5), Job changes his mind and wisely declines to argue. (TLSB)

23:5 After presenting his arguments (v 4), Job would await God’s righteous judgment, anticipating that God would find him innocent of Eliphaz’s charges in 22:6–7, 13–14. (TLSB)

23:6 *pay attention to me*. Job is seeking a fair trial. In 9:14–20 Job was fearful that he could not find words to argue with God. Now he is confident that if God would give him a hearing, he would be acquitted. (CSB)

Job knows that God would condescend to hear Job's plea and self-defense and not overwhelm Job with His majesty. Job's insight offers comfort to all Christians who cry out to God. God will happily incline His ear to their prayers, just as an earthly father does not turn his children away but welcomes and listens to their requests. (TLSB)

23:7 *upright man*. Likely refers to Job, but perhaps Job's recognition that he has a righteous advocate with the Father (1Jn 2:1) who will obtain Job's justification on his behalf. (TLSB)

acquitted. The heavenly courtroom is one of the most ancient images of God's relation to people. Cf 1Ki 22:19; Ps 103:19–22. Job is confident that God will declare him innocent. (TLSB)

23:8–9 *east ... west ... north ... south*. Whatever direction Job went, he could not find God (contrast Ps 139:7–10). (CSB)

The King James Version of verse 8 and 9 are translated thus: "Behold I go forward, but he is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. As different as those two translations may appear to be, they are essentially the same. Both are correct. The Hebrews faced east in determining their directions. To them east, the direction of the rising sun, was forward. West was behind them. As the Hebrews faced east, the direction south was to their right and north to their left. Their names for the four directions are more concrete than ours (east, west, north, south). (PBC)

23:8, 10 *he is not there... But he knows the way that I take*. Job is frustrated over his apparent inability to have an audience with God, who knows that he is an upright man. Job is here answering Eliphaz's admonition beginning in 22:21: "Submit to God and ... prosperity will come." Job replies that this is what he has always done (vv. 11–12). He treasures God's words more than his daily food. He admits that God is testing him—not to purge away his sinful dross, but to show that Job is pure gold (see Ps 119:11, 101, 168; 1Pe 1:7). (CSB)

Job's senses cannot perceive God's eternal presence. God's invisibility requires Job and all people to live by faith and not by sight. Cf 2Co 5:7. (TLSB)

23:9 *not behold*. Job wishes to see God with his naked eye—something that will happen for him and for all in the resurrection. Cf 19:25–27. (TLSB)

23:10 *I shall come out as gold*. Job believes a trial would prove him innocent, as pure as smelted gold. Where Eliphaz earlier called on Job to regard God as more precious than gold (22:25), here Job confesses his belief that God will regard him likewise. (TLSB)

23:11 *His steps ... His way*. Cf Dt 30:15–18. Job maintains that he has lived faithfully. (TLSB)

23:12 Job's response to the advice offered by Eliphaz in 22:22. (CSB)

commandment. Though God later speaks directly to Job in chs 38–41, God's commands were also written into Job's heart. Cf Rm 2:15. Aug: "Behold the meek man, behold one taught in the law of God, the eternal law of God I mean. For that law on tables was not yet given to the Jews in the time of Job, but in the hearts of the godly there remained still the eternal law, from which that which was given to the people was copied" (NPNF 1 6:353). (TLSB)

words ... more than my portion of food. See Dt 8:3. – (quoted by Jesus in response to the devil’s temptation (see Mt 4:4; Lk 4:4). Bread sustains but does not guarantee life, which is God’s gift to those who trust in and live by his word: his commands and promises (see vv. 1, 18). God’s “discipline” (v. 5) of his people by bringing them through the desert taught them this fundamental truth. There they were humbled (cf. v. 14) by being cast in total dependence on the Lord.) (CSB)

23:13 *he is unchangeable.* † Lit. “he is one (unique).” Job worships the one true God—there is no other (see Dt 6:4 and note [A divinely revealed insight, especially important in view of the multiplicity of Baals and other gods of Canaan and elsewhere]). (CSB)

Lit, “He [God] is in one.” Statement of God’s uniqueness, which anticipates the ancient creed of Israel, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Dt 6:4). (TLSB)

turn. Hbr *shub*, “who can change Him?” (TLSB)

what he desires, that he does. He is sovereign (see Ps 115:3; 135:6; Lk 10:21). (CSB)

23:14 *appoints for me.* God seems like Job’s enemy, acting randomly and maliciously. Job recognizes that God makes and carries out His own plan for His servants, even if they do not understand how or why. (TLSB)

23:15 *I am terrified.* A necessary part of Job’s faith is fear of a God who does what he pleases. By contrast, the counselors tried to make God predictable. (CSB)

23:17 *I am not silenced because of the darkness.* Job responds to Eliphaz’s accusation in 22:11. (CSB)

because of the darkness. While Job fears God (v 15), he refuses to be afraid of anything else. Even though Job can perceive only darkness and gloom (see note, v 8), God alone remains both his terror (v 16) and his confidence. (TLSB)