

JOB

Chapter 9

Job Replies: There Is No Arbiter

Then Job answered and said: 2 “Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God? 3 If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand times. 4 He is wise in heart and mighty in strength—who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?—5 he who removes mountains, and they know it not, 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 searching out, and marvelous things beyond number. 11 Behold, he passes by me, and I see him not; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. 12 Behold, he snatches away; who can turn him back? Who will say to him, ‘What are you doing?’ 13 “God will not turn back his anger; beneath him bowed the helpers of Rahab. 14 How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? 15 Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. 16 If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening 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, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? 20 Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. 21 I am blameless; I regard not 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 faces of its judges—if it is not he, who then is it? 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 face, 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 labor in vain? 30 If I wash myself with snow and cleanse my hands with lye, 31 yet you will plunge me into a pit, and my own clothes will abhor me. 32 For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. 33 There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. 34 Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me. 35 Then I would speak without fear of him, for I am not so in myself.

9:1 *how can a man be in the right before God* – Job had lost most of his property and all of his children and was suffering such intense pain that he was almost beside himself. His big question was: Why? (PBC)

9:2 *it is so.* Job agrees with Bildad’s theological statement that God does not pervert justice (8:3). (TLSB)

how can a man be in the right before God? Reflects the key issue of Jb (1:8–9). He notes that people cannot vindicate themselves before God. The great power of God makes it impossible for mortal humans to defend themselves against Him. All this shows Job that he must have an arbiter or mediator (vv 15, 33). (TLSB)

9:2–3 Job does not believe that he is sinless, but he wishes to have his day in court so that he can prove he is innocent of the kind of sin that deserves the suffering he endures. In his despair he voices awful complaints against God (see vv. 16–20, 22–24, 29–35; 10:1–7, 13–17). Yet he does not abandon God; he does not curse him (see 10:2, 8–12), as Satan said he would (see 1:11; 2:5). Ch. 42 implies that Job persevered, but chs. 9–10 show that he did so with impatience (see 4:2; 6:11; 21:4). Cf. Jas 5:11, which speaks of Job’s perseverance, not (as traditionally) his patience. (CSB)

9:3 *contend*. See v. 14. Job’s speech is filled with the imagery of the courtroom: “answer him” (vv. 3, 15, 32), “argue with him” (v. 14), “innocent ... plead ... Judge” (v. 15), “summon(ed)” (vv. 16, 19), “pronounce me guilty” (v. 20), “judges” (v. 24), “court” (v. 32), “charges ... against me” (10:2), “witnesses” (10:17). Job argues his innocence, but he feels that because God is so great there is no use in contending with him (v. 14). Job’s innocence does him no good (v. 15). (CSB)

9:4 *hardened*. Stubborn resistance against God is futile. (TLSB)

9:5–10† A beautiful hymn about God’s greatness. But Job is not heartened by it, for he seems to forget that God’s power is controlled by goodness and justice. (CSB)

These words remind us of many poetic passages of the OT, including Psalms 46,104,147 and Isaiah 40:12-31. (PBC)

9:6 *pillars*. See 26:11. The metaphor of the earth resting on a foundation (see 38:6; 1Sa 2:8; Ps 75:3; 104:5) is changed in 26:7 to a description of the earth suspended over nothing. (CSB)

The earth and also the heavens are poetically described as resting on pillars (1Sm 2:8). However, 26:7 states that God “hangs the earth on nothing.” (TLSB)

9:7 *does not rise*. If He does not want the sun to shine, it will not (e.g., during an eclipse). God controls even the celestial bodies. (TLSB)

9:8 *stretched out the heavens*. Either (1) creates the heavens (see Isa 44:24), or perhaps (2) causes the dawn to spread, like a man stretching out a tent (see Ps 104:2). (CSB)

trampled the waves. Canaanite texts describe the goddess Asherah as walking on the sea (or sea-god) to subdue it. Similarly, God “treads on the waves” to control the boisterous sea. (CSB)

Themes of God’s power as Creator and Redeemer also come together in Is 44:24. The point: trust God, who has power to save! (TLSB)

9:9 *Bear ... Orion ... Pleiades*. These three constellations are mentioned again in 38:31–32, and the last two are mentioned in Am 5:8. Despite their limited knowledge of astronomy, the ancient Israelites were awed by the fact that God had created the constellations. (CSB)

chambers. Perhaps another constellation or a reference to the stars south of the constellations. (TLSB)

9:10 The same words are spoken by Eliphaz in 5:9. (CSB)

9:11 *passes by me.* Job laments that he cannot establish contact with God to plead his case. For Job, God is like a shadowy figure that quickly passes by without stopping or turning aside. (TLSB)

9:12 *snatches away.* God takes what He wants—who can stop Him or call Him to account? (TLSB)

who can turn him around? Job argues that God has an unchallengeable, sovereign freedom that works to accomplish everything he pleases. (CSB)

9:13 *helpers.* Less-powerful military allies that joined with Rahab (cf Is 51:9). (TLSB)

Rahab.† Not the prostitute Rahab of Jos 2 (which is spelled differently in Hebrew) but a mythical sea monster (see 26:12), elsewhere used as symbolic of Egypt. (CSB)

Figure borrowed from Babylonian creation myth; she symbolizes God's powerful enemies, which He has defeated. (TLSB)

9:15 *I cannot answer him.* God's fairness is unimpeachable (see Ge 18:25 and note). (CSB)

Courtroom imagery; Job acknowledges that he cannot argue with God, even though Job thinks he is in the right. God is too powerful, and His anger is overwhelming. The best Job can do is plead for mercy (which he cannot do without losing his integrity). (TLSB)

9:16 *listening to my voice.* Job despairs of getting a fair hearing before God, even if Job were to speak with Him directly. (TLSB)

9:17 *wounds without cause.* Job argues that his suffering is disproportionate to his offense, whatever that may be. He cannot yet see any reason for his pain and loss. (TLSB)

Job does not know that God has allowed Satan to crush him for a high purpose. (CSB)

9:20 *my own mouth would condemn me.* Even if God allowed Job to call Him to account, Job fears he could not make a reasonable defense—he would condemn himself in the presence of God Almighty. (TLSB)

9:21 *blameless.* Job will not beg for mercy, because he is convinced he has done nothing wrong. He continues to maintain his integrity. (TLSB)

I loathe my life. See 7:16; words of despairing resignation that would be partially echoed in Job's final outpouring of repentance (see 42:6). (CSB)

9:22–24 God has become Job's great enigma. Job describes a phantom God—one who does not exist, except in Job's mind. The God of the Bible is not morally indifferent (cf. God's words in 38:2; 40:2 and Job's response in 42:3). (CSB)

9:22–23 *It is all one.* Job portrays God as treating all people the same. Regardless of their actions, He destroys them. *He mocks.* God derides the wicked and innocent together (cf Ps 2, esp v 4). (TLSB)

9:24 *covers the faces of its judges.* Our statues of Lady Justice are blindfolded, implying that she will judge impartially. But Job’s accusation against God is that he has blindfolded the judges so that they see neither crimes nor innocence. (CSB)

Job unwittingly describes what happened in chs 1–2. He holds God responsible for his suffering and for injustice in the world. Nowhere else in Job’s speeches does he come so close to accusing God of injustice. Remember that Job speaks from great pain, anguish, and grief. He sees everything through the eyes of his own suffering and is unaware of God’s plan and purpose. (TLSB)

9:26 *skiffs of reed.* Light rowboats or small sailing ships. These were often made of papyrus (reed), a plant that grows in marshy areas in the Near East. Propelled by a good wind, a light ship would move across the water very fast. (TLSB)

9:28 *you will not hold me innocent.* Job wants to stand before God as an innocent man—not sinless, but innocent of any sin commensurate with his suffering. (CSB)

9:29 *I shall be condemned.* As appears from the bitter suffering he is enduring. (CSB)

Job thinks any effort to defend himself would be useless. (TLSB)

9:30 *lye.* Even the most powerful cleaning agents cannot purify him. (TLSB)

9:31 *pit.* Place of burial; associated with decomposing bodies. (TLSB)

my own clothes will abhor me. He is so filthy that his own clothes would refuse to stay on him. (TLSB)

9:33 *no arbiter between.* God is so immense that Job feels he needs someone who can help him, someone who can argue his case in court. Job’s call is not directly predicting the mediatorship of Christ, for Job is not looking for one to forgive him but for one who can testify to his innocence (see 16:20–21; 19:25–26). (CSB)

Hbr *mokiach.* A person who settles quarrels, sets things right. Job laments the lack of a mediator between God and himself who could resolve this problem and reconcile them. (TLSB)

lay his hand on us both. Concrete image of someone who could reach out to these two hostile parties (God and Job) and bring them together again. Greg: “The Redeemer of Mankind, who was made the Mediator between God and Man through the flesh ... did both convict man, that he might not sin, and withstand God, that He might not smite; He gave examples of innocency that He took upon Him the punishment due to wickedness” (ALF 18:541) (TLSB)

Job had learned about the true God and the true religion. He must also have learned that God would in due time send his Son to be the Savior of this world. In the Incarnation the divine Christ did appear as man’s Umpire, his Middleman, his Mediator. The Referee, Jesus Christ, laid his one hand on God’s shoulder and his other hand on man’s shoulder and brought them together. He removed the rod of God’s just wrath from man by deflecting it and making its deadly strokes fall on himself. (PBC)

9:34 *his rod.* Symbolic of divine judgment and wrath (see, e.g., Ps 89:32; La 3:1). (CSB)

Ch 9 Job has no hope of fixing the problem with God. God is too powerful and there is no one to mediate between him and God—not even Job’s friends. When we are at our lowest, we might agree with Job that there is no hope. If we focus on our pain or problems and look only to ourselves or others for help, we should not be surprised to find only despair. Without a mediator, we face the full wrath of God. Looking back on his first service as a priest, Luther recounted: “[When I] thought I had to speak to God without a Mediator, I felt like fleeing from the world like Judas. Who can bear the majesty of God without Christ as Mediator?” (AE 54:234; cf 1Tm 2:5). • Thank You, heavenly Father, for sending Your Son, our Savior Jesus, to reconcile us to You through the cross and to intercede for us every day (1Jn 2:1). Amen. (TLSB)