



*Job 21:27-24:25: Job Crosses a Line*

Confused and exhausted by arguing with his friends, Job says he wants to lay his case before God.

*I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. – Job 23:4-7 (ESV)*

He'll get his chance too, but he's not going to like it.

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T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)  
Thank you.

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## 1 Job 21:27-22:11 (ESV)

*“Behold, I know your thoughts and your schemes to wrong me. For you say, ‘Where is the house of the prince? Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?’ Have you not asked those who travel the roads, and do you not accept their testimony that the evil man is spared in the day of calamity, that he is rescued in the day of wrath? Who declares his way to his face, and who repays him for what he has done? When he is carried to the grave, watch is kept over his tomb. The clods of the valley are sweet to him; all mankind follows after him, and those who go before him are innumerable. How then will you comfort me with empty nothings? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.”*

*Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:*

*“Can a man be profitable to God? Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself. Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are in the right, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless? Is it for your fear of him that he reproves you and enters into judgment with you? Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities. For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing and stripped the naked of their clothing. You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land, and the favored man lived in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed. Therefore snares are all around you, and sudden terror overwhelms you, or darkness, so that you cannot see, and a flood of water covers you.*

The argument between Job and his friends has gone nuclear. Job hits pretty hard with, *“Behold, I know your thoughts and your schemes to wrong me. . . . How then will you comfort me with empty nothings? There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.”*

But that’s nothing compared to Eliphaz saying, *“Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities. . . . You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.”* Where does he get this nonsense?

Notice that he makes this ridiculous accusation, then says, *“Therefore snares are all around you, and sudden terror overwhelms you, or darkness, so that you cannot see, and a flood of water covers you.”* Actually, his logic is the reverse. He believes that since *snares are all around you, etc.*, therefore *there is no end to your iniquities, etc.*

The temper of the disagreement has caused Eliphaz to amplify his point beyond reason. He had been saying that Job must have done something wrong to deserve his suffering. Now, in the heat of argument, he says that Job must be a horrible person to deserve it. Then he makes a bunch of specific charges that make absolutely no sense.

How is this even possible? He’s not hallucinating.

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This is rooted in sin. He makes the trek to see Job and to cheer him up, but no priority can contend with Eliphaz defending Eliphaz. In the end, he’d rather accuse Job of a life of crime (and trash his original mission) than admit any possibility of an error in one of his assumptions.

Is sin stupid or what? And make no mistake, this is the condition Jesus died to deliver us from.

And don’t think the deliverance is instantaneous either. We do dumb stuff like this too.

## 2 Job 22:12-30 (ESV)

*‘Is not God high in the heavens? See the highest stars, how lofty they are! But you say, ‘What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven.’ Will you keep to the old way that wicked men have trod? They were snatched away before their time; their foundation was washed away. They said to God, ‘Depart from us,’ and ‘What can the Almighty do to us?’ Yet he filled their houses with good things—but the counsel of the wicked is far from me. The righteous see it and are glad; the innocent one mocks at them, saying, ‘Surely our adversaries are cut off, and what they left the fire has consumed.’*

*“Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty you will be built up; if you remove injustice far from your tents, if you lay gold in the dust, and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed, then the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver. For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. You will make your prayer to him, and he will hear you, and you will pay your vows. You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you, and light will shine on your ways. For when they are humbled you say, ‘It is because of pride’; but he saves the lowly. He delivers even the one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.”*

Have you ever had someone react to something you said with, “So you mean that ...” and then they say something totally strange to you? This isn’t rare. People don’t hear what you say; they hear what they think you mean. They filter everything they hear through their assumptions.

That’s what Eliphaz is doing here. He says to Job, “*But you say, ‘What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds veil him, so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven.’*”

Job not only didn’t say that, he never said anything remotely close to that. How could Eliphaz hear something so different from what Job said?

Eliphaz assumes that God’s justice is immediate; God acts on every injustice He sees. Thus, he “heard” Job saying that God’s vision is obstructed.

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Different people see things differently. This presents special challenges when teaching the Bible. Everyone interprets each Bible passage through the lens of their own world view. For example, someone who thinks that miracles never happen will see the parting of the Red Sea in terms of how it could happen naturally.

But this isn’t just about how some people think; this is how all human perception works. For a thorough explanation, see:

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/universe-changed/>

This is why listening is so essential to sharing the gospel. If you don’t take the time to learn how someone thinks, you won’t be communicating what you think you’re communicating.

### 3 Job 23:1-17 (ESV)

*Then Job answered and said:*

*“Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.*

*“Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; 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. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food. But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me, and many such things are in his mind. Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; yet I am not silenced because of the darkness, nor because thick darkness covers my face.”*

At last, Job cracks. Now he wants to question God.

*I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge.*

Sure Job, that’s exactly how this will play out. Not.

But you are right when you say that God will *pay attention to me*. Enjoy the attention!

Note that this is the necessary next step – and it wouldn’t have happened without Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. By arguing that Job’s afflictions must be due to some sin of his, they got Job to detail how life is unfair. This got him all worked up and his deep-seated concerns about why things work the way they do bubbled to the surface.

That’s why God sent these three yahoos to “comfort” Job. This needs to come out.

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Job is hitting bottom. He is reduced to questioning God – a sorry state of affairs if there ever was one.

We normally associate hitting bottom with people who have major problems (such as addiction) and need to turn their lives around. Job seems about as far from that profile as you can get.

But here is one of the great lessons of this book. No one is above needing to hit bottom.

Sin is just an amazing condition. Every one of us could use a personal revival.

4 Job 24:1-12 (NKJV)

*“Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, Why do those who know Him see not His days?”*

*“Some remove landmarks; They seize flocks violently and feed on them; They drive away the donkey of the fatherless; They take the widow’s ox as a pledge. They push the needy off the road; All the poor of the land are forced to hide. Indeed, like wild donkeys in the desert, They go out to their work, searching for food. The wilderness yields food for them and for their children. They gather their fodder in the field And glean in the vineyard of the wicked. They spend the night naked, without clothing, And have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, And huddle around the rock for want of shelter.*

*“Some snatch the fatherless from the breast, And take a pledge from the poor. They cause the poor to go naked, without clothing; And they take away the sheaves from the hungry. They press out oil within their walls, And tread winepresses, yet suffer thirst. The dying groan in the city, And the souls of the wounded cry out; Yet God does not charge them with wrong.”*

The first paragraph is essential to understanding the last one. The line, “*Yet God does not charge them with wrong.*” seems to say that God doesn’t judge them. But Job’s complaint is, “*Why do those who know Him see not His days?*”

In other words, “Why don’t we get to see the wicked get their comeuppance?”

But who says we’re supposed to get to see that? God’s judgement is his business. Our desire to be part of it (even if only as an audience) is a desire to play a heavenly role that God does not promise us. While this desire may not seem all that bad – it even sounds a bit righteous – it is, in fact, sinful at an elementary level.

Remember, the fall is rooted in man’s desire to *be like God*. This desire has the same roots.

Job doesn’t realize how wrong his complaint is.

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When most people think about what sin is, they think about lust or greed or something simple like that. Yes, those are sinful, but they’re really just symptoms. The essence of sin is deeper.

Reread how our sin began and think about what’s really going on there. Ask God to open your eyes to the great truths in this passage. Can you see yourself in this?

*But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. – Genesis 3:4-7 (ESV)*

5 Job 24:13-25 (NKJV)

*“There are those who rebel against the light; They do not know its ways Nor abide in its paths. The murderer rises with the light; He kills the poor and needy; And in the night he is like a thief. The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, Saying, ‘No eye will see me’; And he disguises his face. In the dark they break into houses Which they marked for themselves in the daytime; They do not know the light. For the morning is the same to them as the shadow of death; If someone recognizes them, They are in the terrors of the shadow of death.*

*“They should be swift on the face of the waters, Their portion should be cursed in the earth, So that no one would turn into the way of their vineyards. As drought and heat consume the snow waters, So the grave consumes those who have sinned. The womb should forget him, The worm should feed sweetly on him; He should be remembered no more, And wickedness should be broken like a tree. For he preys on the barren who do not bear, And does no good for the widow.*

*“But God draws the mighty away with His power; He rises up, but no man is sure of life. He gives them security, and they rely on it; Yet His eyes are on their ways. They are exalted for a little while, Then they are gone. They are brought low; They are taken out of the way like all others; They dry out like the heads of grain. ‘Now if it is not so, who will prove me a liar, And make my speech worth nothing?’”*

The Hebrew in the middle paragraph is tricky. The word “should” isn’t in the text. So, the ESV begins with, “*You say, ‘Swift are they on the face of the waters ...’*” But, “*You say,*” isn’t in the text either. A straight reading of the Hebrew makes this paragraph sound like something Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar might say. It’s saying the wicked do get punished.

Since Job couldn’t possibly have said that, there must be some unknown ancient Hebrew idiom involved here. The translators can only guess what Job actually meant. So they look at the context to puzzle this out – particularly the preceding verses. In Chapter 23, Job starts to question God’s approach to dealing with evil. The first sentence of Chapter 24 is important too.

*“Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, Why do those who know Him see not His days?”*

In that context, it’s reasonable for the NKJV to guess that Job meant that all these things “should” happen. Of course, what “should” happen is not something Job is qualified to judge.

Job has completely lost it and has launched into a rant that’s going to get him called out by God.

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This is not saying that it’s wrong to ask questions of God. The issues of how and when God judges are good topics. In fact, this book is in the Bible to address those questions. Job’s confrontational attitude will get him called out, but we are being encouraged here to consider why God withholds punishment from the wicked. Studying this book is studying these questions. That can’t be a bad thing.

This is a good time to take stock and meditate on exactly how those questions are phrased in your own mind and what you think the answers might be.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. When you're trying to help someone, do you ever get distracted from your original mission? Do these distractions ever seem to be of supernatural origin (or at least "fishy")?
2. What are some of the biggest or funniest miscommunications you've experienced?
3. What was your lowest moment (where you doubted God)? What did you learn from that? Was there a specific wake-up call?
4. How can a desire for justice be sinful?
5. Why does God often withhold punishment from the wicked while allowing saints to suffer?

*Items for prayer:*