

### Job's Third Response to Eliphaz

#### Job 23-24

**Job 23:1-12** – *“Then Job answered and said: <sup>2</sup>“Even today my complaint is bitter; my hand is listless because of my groaning. <sup>3</sup>Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, so I might come to His seat! <sup>4</sup>I would present my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments. <sup>5</sup>I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say to me. <sup>6</sup>Would He contend with me in His great power? No! But He would take note of me. <sup>7</sup>There the upright could reason with Him, and I would be delivered forever from my Judge.*

*<sup>8</sup>“Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him. <sup>9</sup>When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him. <sup>10</sup>But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. <sup>11</sup>My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. <sup>12</sup>I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”*

#### Background Notes

*“When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).* This verse is well known, but it is usually **removed from its context**, and thus **wrongly interpreted**. The usual interpretation is that Job was likening God to an assayer or refiner, and Job's sufferings were like a crucible. The result of God's refining work would be that the dross in Job's life would be burned off, and he would come forth from his suffering as refined gold.

Now that concept is certainly taught in Scripture - but that concept is **not** taught in the **context** of Job 23! 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, *“Though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* So the Bible does indeed teach that God tests our faith, and the testing process is like the refining of gold - but that is not the thought when Job 23:10 is interpreted in its context.

The **context** of Job 23 is that Job was convinced that he **already** was pure gold! He believed that there was no sinful dross to be burned away, as his counselors were suggesting. And the testing process, said Job, would **prove** that he was gold! I don't think any of us would dare to take that position! We all know that there's sinful dross in our lives, and we need God to purge it away. I doubt any of us would make a claim of innocence, as Job did here, as well as in other chapters we've studied. And Job will continue to make the claim of innocence in the chapters ahead.

The three counselors will finally realize that Job is not going to back down from his claim of innocence. Look at Job 33:8-9, where Elihu, Job's fourth counselor, says: *"You have spoken in my hearing, and I have heard the sound of your words, saying, 'I am pure, without transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me.'"*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. In his third response to Eliphaz, Job requests God's presence to prove his innocence.

In Job 23:1-7, Job longs to present his case directly to the Lord. He admits that his complaint is somewhat rebellious, but he is convinced that if the Lord would just listen to his evidence, he would be found innocent (v2). Even though Job can't find God, no matter what direction he looks, he knows that God is there (v8-9). And after all the testing is over, Job is sure that the Lord will see that he hasn't departed from His ways and His words, but he is like pure gold (v10-12).

**Job 23:13-17** - *"But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does. <sup>14</sup> For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him. <sup>15</sup> Therefore I am terrified at His presence. When I consider this, I am afraid of Him. <sup>16</sup> For God made my heart weak, and the Almighty terrifies me <sup>17</sup>because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness, and He did not hide deep darkness from my face."*

Job is awed and even fearful when he thinks about God's absolute sovereignty over all things: Job knows that his case is completely in God's hands, but he doesn't know what God's full intentions are in His dealings. In spite of the **"darkness"** of not fully understanding God's intentions, Job is determined he will not be silenced regarding his case. In his third response to Eliphaz, Job requests God's presence to prove his innocence.

## Chapter 24

### 2. In his third response to Eliphaz, Job questions why God delays his judgment.

**Job 24:1-17** - *"Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, why do those who know Him see not His days?*

*<sup>2</sup> "Some remove landmarks; they seize flocks violently and feed on them. <sup>3</sup> they drive away the donkey of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox as a pledge. <sup>4</sup> They push the needy off the road. All the poor of the land are forced to hide.*

*<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> They gather their fodder in the field and glean in the vineyard of the wicked. <sup>7</sup> They spend the night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. <sup>8</sup> They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and huddle around the rock for want of shelter. <sup>9</sup> "Some snatch the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge from the poor. <sup>10</sup> They cause the poor to go naked, without clothing; they take away the sheaves from the hungry. <sup>11</sup> They press out*

*oil within their walls, and tread winepresses, yet suffer thirst. <sup>12</sup> The dying groan in the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out, yet God does not charge them with wrong.*

*<sup>13</sup> "There are those who rebel against the light. They do not know its ways nor abide in its paths. <sup>14</sup> The murderer rises with the light. He kills the poor and needy, and in the night he is like a thief. <sup>15</sup> The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, saying, 'No eye will see me.' And he disguises his face. <sup>16</sup> In the dark they break into houses that they marked for themselves in the daytime. They do not know the light. <sup>17</sup> 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."*

In these verses Job lists a number of the sins of the wicked, and asks, Why does God allow evildoers to go unpunished? And, if there is judgment, why does God delay His judgment? Job is certainly not the last person to ask these questions! In fact, maybe you've wondered, How can God allow wickedness and evil to go unpunished? Remember - Job did not have the New Testament to enlighten his understanding, as we do today.

**Job 24:18-25** - *"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. <sup>19</sup> As drought and heat consume the snow waters, so the grave consumes those who have sinned. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> For he preys on the barren, who do not bear, and does no good for the widow. <sup>22</sup> "But God draws the mighty away with His power. He rises up, but no man is sure of life. <sup>23</sup> He gives them security, and they rely on it; yet His eyes are on their ways. <sup>24</sup> 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.*

*<sup>25</sup> "Now if it is not so, who will prove me a liar, and make my speech worth nothing?"*

In verses 18-25 Job appears to contradict himself. In verses 1-17 he asks why God delays His judgment, but in verses 18-25 he says God does judge the wicked! No, he doesn't contradict himself. Job is convinced that the wicked will be judged in death, even if not in life (v18). Listen to verses 18-20 from another translation: *"But how quickly they disappear from the face of the earth. Everything they own is cursed. The grave will consume the wicked. As drought and heat consume the snow's waters, so the grave consumes those who have sinned. The wicked will be remembered no more, and will be broken like a tree."*

And the answer as to why God will judge the wicked is found in verse 21: *"For he preys on the barren who do not bear, and does no good for the widow."*

The wicked in high places are exalted for only a short time before God takes them away. Verses 22-24: *"But God draws the mighty away with His power; he rises up, but no man is sure of life. <sup>23</sup> He gives them security, and they rely on it; yet His eyes are on their ways. <sup>24</sup> 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."*

Job is convinced that this is the correct theological viewpoint. Verse 25: *"Now if it is not so, who will prove me a liar, and make my speech worth nothing?"*

But Job is still not completely satisfied with God's timetable of judging the wicked, so in his third response to Eliphaz, Job questions why God delays His judgment.

## Practical Application

### Delight in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God!

The doctrine of the **sovereignty** of God is that **God is in total control of everything**! As Ephesians 1:11 says, *"God works **all** things after the counsel of His will."* And as I've said so often, "There is not a single maverick molecule in the universe!"

How does that doctrine strike you? Do you delight in it - or do you dread it? Is it a comfort? Or do you question God's ways in your life? At the end of Job 23, when Job considered the truth that God is sovereign, he was in awe of God - and he was even fearful. Why? He was afraid, because he didn't know God's full intentions regarding his suffering. Well - praise the Lord! - we have more revelation of God's intentions than Job had. We have the truth of Romans 8:28, that God is working all things together for our ultimate good!

Ephesians 1:11 says, *"God works all things after the counsel of His will."* And Romans 8:28 says, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."* God's ultimate purpose for our lives is that we would be *"conformed to the likeness of His Son"* (Romans 8:29). **It doesn't get any better than that!**

So take delight in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God!