

The Book of Job
Chapters 6 & 7
Job's First Response to Eliphaz

Job doesn't back down in the face of Eliphaz's advice. He affirms that his complaint against God doesn't undermine his righteousness. He charges his friend with insensitivity and lack of insight. Since he's still keenly aware that he hasn't sinned, none of Eliphaz's remarks apply to him. As a result he continues his complaint against God.

Job 6:1-7

6:1-2 Job begins his response by declaring the painful reality of his suffering. He wishes for a huge scale or balance upon which he could place his pain so his friends could see how heavy the burden of his suffering was. He uses the same word ("vexation", ESV; "anguish", NIV) that Eliphaz had used in Job 5:2. If such a scale were available, his friends would understand his rash-sounding words. What's the most intense pain the world? Our *own* pain. No one else can feel the weight of our private pain. What's our comfort in such a situation?

6:3 Job admits that his words (in chapter 3) were rash, but the suffering he was enduring (heavier than the sand of the seas) made them justifiable.

6:4 Job repeats the complaint that God has turned against him. Poisonous arrows from God are sapping his spirit, "the terrors of God" are against him. In such circumstances should his friends expect him meekly to accept God's torment silently?

6:5 Job appeals to nature. The ox and donkey don't bellow when they have food. Their noise is a complaint when they have nothing to eat. The losses of his life have ruined Job's appetite for life. Therefore his complaint is to be *expected* not *criticized*.

6:6 "juice of the mallow" (ESV) or "sap of the mallow" (NIV). The King James, and many other translations, translates this as "white of an egg" which is possible. The Lutheran Study Bible says that "mallow" refers to:

"Any plant from the genus *malva*, which produces an unappealing slime. In other words, the speech of Eliphaz in chs 4–5 is bland, shallow, and insipid."

Does that help? Probably not. How about this from the Lexham Bible Dictionary?:
MALLOW A tall, shrub-like orach [saltbush], which grows to the height of about 10 ft. Its buds and leaves, along with other saline plants, were eaten by many Palestinians.

You may have a footnote in your Bible which says something like, "The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain." Let's stick with "the white of an egg". It's a much easier image to visualize.

6:8-13

Job returns to the complaints of chapter 3. Though he will not curse God and die, he asks God to curse *him* so he could die. If God would only strike him dead, Job knows that he could die in the confidence that he had not sinned.

6:10 This is a powerful testimony to Job's confidence that he hasn't fallen short of God's expectations for him. He specifically declares that he has "*not denied*" God's words. The KJV most literally translates the Hebrew word as "*concealed*" but the modern versions correctly interpret Job's meaning with the word "*denied*." He meant that he hadn't hidden God's words by making them a private matter or private relationship between himself and God. Rather, Job had lived out the instructions and word of God publicly in his life. Put another way, Job was affirming that his life had not *contradicted* God's words, but had *exemplified* them.

This is a moving and important testimony for several reasons. First, it's spiritually uplifting to see a person whose life embodies the will of God. All of us need to see human beings living out the will of God so that his will isn't abstract *theory* but realistic and understandable *life*. Job's testimony calls us to a life of integrity in which we can be an example of the way God intends life to be lived.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for us, Job shows us here that a right relationship with God can't be kept in the private dimensions of our lives. There's such an over-emphasis on a personal and individual relationship with God that faith is made a private matter. While it's *personal*, faith isn't *private* if it's Biblical faith. Biblical faith is persistently public. What one believes *privately* is of no interest to Biblical people unless it's demonstrated by the way one lives *publicly*. At first glance, that would seem to go along with the statement of some fundamentalist denominations, "Deeds, not creeds." Why doesn't it really?

6:11-13 Job again attempts to justify his complaint against God. He knows that he isn't strong enough to bear such pain forever. There's nothing to be gained by suffering in silence, from Job's perspective. The end of his life is near, so he feels that he must cry out to God.

6:14-23

These verses contain Job's accusation against his friends. The tone of these verses is less emotional and more reasoned. Job acknowledges that these *are* his friends and brothers. He begins by accusing them of failing to keep their obligations of friendship to him. But, he concludes the section by inviting them to try again to instruct him.

6:14 The section begins with a powerful criticism. Job says:

"A *despairing man should have the devotion of his friends,*" (NIV)

"*He who withholds kindness from his friend,*" (ESV)

"*To him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friend,*" (KJV)

The word variously translated as “devotion,” “kindness, or “pity” is the Hebrew word “*kheh’-sed*” (כֶּחֶד) This word is used most often in the Old Testament to speak about the “*loving kindness*” of God toward his people. This word speaks of covenant loyalty and faithfulness, as in Psalm 23:6, “*Surely goodness and mercy (loving kindness) shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*”

Job believes that friendship involves an actual covenant of mutual commitment and support. Failure to live up to that covenant of friendship is to abandon “*the fear (or reverence) of the Almighty.*”

This expression is important for two reasons. First, it’s another way of referring to the fear of the Lord, which the wisdom tradition defines as the source of wisdom. Thus, failure to observe the covenant of friendship is to reject the wisdom taught in Proverbs (keeping in mind that the Book of Job predates the Book of Proverbs). Second, Job specifically calls God “*the Almighty*” in this verse. Eliphaz had used the same name for God in Job 5:17. Job’s response to Eliphaz is that “*the fear of the Almighty*” is more important than “*the discipline of the Almighty.*” Eliphaz was emphasizing the importance of God’s discipline, and not speaking of fear or reverence toward God.

6:15-17 Job accuses the friends of being unreliable. They’re like run-off water in the desert rather than a steady spring of water. Even in the Middle East, the people are familiar with melting snow and ice. The top of Mount Hermon, in northern Israel, is snow-covered in the winter; and light snow can occasionally fall in the lower elevations as well.

Job is saying that now that life has turned dry for him, his friends had nothing (no water) to offer.

6:18-20 Ancient caravans depended on certain oases or water holes, but when they arrive at a water hole and it’s dry, they panic as they look frantically for another.

6:21 This verse makes the application. Job’s friends had all the answers they and he needed when life was going well for him. Their theology was adequate as long as the water held out. But when they came to him and found him so devastated, their familiar answers went dry. Their words of comfort were no more to Job than the panicked repeating of old water hole formulas. Forcefully, Job has declared that his friends don’t understand his pain and they don’t know what they’re talking about.

Job 6:24-30

Job opens the door for them to try again. He invites his friends to teach him, and promises that he will be silent long enough to listen.

- 6:25 Job declares that honest words are powerful. This is an important truth. The Hebrew literally speaks of “straight” words. We could say today that Job was thinking of “no-spin” words. Words of integrity will be effective. Job was willing to submit his life and his words to examination in the confidence that straight talk will lead to the truth.
- 6:28 Job appeals to his friends to look him in the eye and he promises an honest response to them.

Job 7

Chapter 7 changes directions. Job is no longer responding to Eliphaz and his friends. Rather, he renews his complaint against God. All 21 verses are part of a lament. Job begins to speak realistically of his pain in this chapter instead of simply cursing the day of his birth as he did in chapter 3. This shows that he’s beginning to cope with the reality of his pain. This is the first step toward making peace with God over the losses he’s sustained.

- 7:1-6 These verses describe the great pain of Job. He laments the hard life that all human beings suffer, and then graphically describes the worms, scabs, crusts, and oozing that accompanied the disease afflicting his body.
In verse 6, what is a “*weaver’s shuttle*”?

- 7:7-10 Job asks God to remember his frail condition. He’s convinced that he’s about to die—to descend to Sheol, or the grave, as verse 9 puts it. Verse 9 at first gives the impression that death is the end of existence.

Job was sure that God didn’t realize how far gone he was. He’s also sure that if God would only understand how precarious his condition was that he (God) would respond in compassion. These verses reveal Job’s continuing confidence in God’s goodness.

- 7:11-16 Here, Job returns to the lament. Since God has treated him so badly Job must respond forcefully. He will not keep silent nor restrain himself from words others might consider disrespectful. *They* aren’t the ones suffering.

In verse 12, Job speaks about the creature (*tan-neen*) variously translated as a “*whale*,” “*sea monster*,” or a “*monster of the deep*.” The sea, and the great creatures which live in the sea, were symbols of chaos. Job objects to being viewed in this way. How might he think that he was being put under guard?

Job had earlier (6:5) described the physical problems that he believed God had afflicted him with. We know that these problems actually came from Satan. How else did Satan afflict Job (vs. 14-15)?

- 7:17-21 In verse 19 we see the curious expression, “swallow my spit.” The Lutheran Study Bible says that this is an “Ancient proverb, used in Arabic even today,

meaning ‘a very short time.’” Job feels (justifiably) that God is giving him no break or relief from the testing which he’s undergoing.

Job concludes his speech with a plea for God to come to his rescue before it’s too late, before he “*sleeps in the dust.*” Why is it never “too late” for the child of God?