

**The Book of Job**  
**Chapters 16-17**  
**Job's Second Response to Eliphaz**

Few of Job's responses to his "friends" directly answer the charges they make against him. This second response to Eliphaz comes as close as any speech of Job in responding to the friends' accusations. Most of his speeches have begun with a response to the friends, and then shifted to God as the audience. While Job briefly addresses God in this response, most of his words are directed to Eliphaz and his friends. The response begins with an attack on his comforters in Job 16:1-6. This is followed by a personal complaint against God in verses 7-17. In verses 18-22 Job calls on earth and heaven to testify about God's flagrant violation of justice. Chapter 17:1-16 returns to the form of a personal lament.

**16:1-6**

It's easy to find Job's opening words in response to Eliphaz in verses 2-5 as being humorous. Job admits that he would be saying the same things his friends are saying if their positions were reversed. In fact, like his friends, he begins by accusing them of being "wind-bags." That accusation seems to be a part of everybody's speech in response to everybody else. But Job has heard everything they are saying before. God's judgment on the wicked and his blessings on the righteous were simply the folk theology of Middle East—and indeed the theology of human nature. What Job was discovering is that folk theology didn't match his own experience.

Verse 6 most concisely states his problem. If he talks it does no good; and if he's silent it does no good. (Have you "been there, done that"?) Whether Job gives into his friends' viewpoint or not the end result is the same—his suffering goes on. He finds it hard not to be bitter that his friends have turned out to be enemies by tormenting him with prosperity theology in the adversity of his life. How does the prosperity theology of the televangelists cause many to despair rather than rejoice?

**16:7-17**

The hostility of Job's friends is a small matter compared to the sense of hostility Job feels from God. These verses are devoted to a painfully personal lament in which Job complains that God has become an enemy. Eliphaz had claimed that Job was attacking God, but Job responds that it's God who was attacking him. God wearied him, God has devastated his family, God has "*shriveled*" him up (vs. 8, ESV), God has turned him over to the vicious (vs. 11), God has crushed

and shattered him (vs. 12), God's arrows have pierced him (vs. 13), and God charges him like a warrior (vs. 14).

This is the language of ancient warfare. Job complains that God has viciously attacked him.

Verses 15-17 describe the effect of God's attack on Job. He has sewn sackcloth to cover his scabs, he has buried his face in sorrow and pain, his face is inflamed with tears, and dark shadows encircle his eyes. All these terrible consequences have come upon him even though his prayer is pure and there is no violence on his hands. Verse 17 still proclaims Job's innocence. Psalm 17:1 suggests that God is more likely to answer a prayer that arises from pure motives—"*A Prayer of David. 'Hear a just cause, O LORD, attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!'*" Job's claim to integrity is an appeal to God to respond to him.

### **16:18-22**

This represents a new level for Job. In verse 18 he calls on the earth, "*O earth, do not cover my blood.*" The language here echoes Genesis 4:8-15 where the blood of Abel—symbolically—cried out from the ground against Cain. What is Job asking for in verse 18?

Job turns in verse 19 to appeal to his "*witness [who] is in heaven.*" Who, then, is the heavenly witness or advocate to which Job appeals?

This is a turning point for Job. Job and his friends have been "stuck" on the question of righteousness or justice. Is God treating Job justly? Are Job's sufferings the expression of God's righteous judgment against Job's secret sins? Here Job appeals to God's love and faithfulness rather than to justice. The whole plan of salvation arises from the conflict between God's love and God's justice. How did God resolve that conflict in our favor? Here Job appeals to God's holy integrity in stating his earnest hope that God will testify to the truth of his claim of innocence, even though such testimony will seem to contradict God's own actions. Such risking is the essence of faith. For a moment Job sees God as his steadfast supporter. In this plea he's expressing the trust God had expressed in him in the prologue because he's pushing through the darkness of his troubles to the real God. He isn't pitting God against God; rather he's affirming genuine confidence in God, regardless of the way it appears that God is treating him. Since Job—in contrast to his friends—won't concede that truth is identical with

appearances, he presses on for a true resolution to his complaint from God himself.

## Chapter 17

Here Job continues in a personal lament. This chapter should really begin at 16:22. The chapter and verse divisions are “man-made” and not part of the inspired text. Verse 2 comments that before Job dies he’s surrounded by mocking friends.

Regarding verse 3, The Lutheran Study Bible explains the use of the word “*security*” in this way:

*security*. Lit, “striking hands”; gesture confirms the agreement. Since Job has no witness for his security (someone who will lay down a pledge for him in the heavenly court), he prays that God Himself will be merciful and be that witness. The Christian knows that this hope is indeed fulfilled in God’s Son, but it is not known how clearly Job himself saw this. Job has taken a decisive step toward his certain conviction and declaration, recorded in 19:25–27.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 5 contains a proverbial saying, “*the eyes of his children will fail;*” meaning here that his detractors deserve the punishment of those who denounce their friends in order to enrich themselves.

Job returns to his own condition in verses 6-16. In verse 6, almost all translations say something to the effect that, “*God has made me a byword to everyone.*” This is in spite of the fact that “byword” is no longer in common use. It literally means “proverb,” “catch phrase,” or “well-known example.” The Hebrew word which is translated here means “satire.” The Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) is probably the best English translation here when it says, “*He has made me a laughingstock among the people.*” The Living Bible is also good (in this particular case) when it says, “*He has made me a mockery among the people.*” Ordinarily, “The Living Bible” is too much of a paraphrase to be of real value.

In verse 12, how does Job feel about his friends?

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<sup>1</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 804). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

What is Job's question in verses 13-16? Job is back to the type of thoughts he had in 7:6, *"My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle and come to their end without hope."*

Read through the Psalms, and see how 26 times the various psalmists declare their steadfast hope in the Lord, such as in Psalm 130:7, *"O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption."*

This confidence is also expressed throughout the New Testament, as in 1st Peter 1:3-9, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*

What benefit do we have that Job didn't have?