

**WOMEN IN THE WORD**  
OF  
FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CHURCH

“Job: A 12-Week Study” by Eric Ortlund

Week Four: Round One of the Debate, pt.1

February 15, 2022

To understand what we will be reading over the next few weeks, we need to be aware that Job and his comforters base their theology on fear of God as well as integrity of conduct. They all hold the view that God always punishes those who do wrong. This is often referred to as retribution or “retributive justice.” In addition, God always helps and prospers those who do good.

Francis Andersen sums it up well: “The friends must infer from Job’s suffering that he has sinned; Job must infer from his innocence that God is unjust.”

### Chapters 4 & 5, Eliphaz responds

Eliphaz speaks first here and in the other two cycles of the debate. He has been characterized as the “voice of experience.”

(All Scripture quotes are ESV unless noted otherwise.)

Eliphaz feels compelled to comment in response to Job’s lament:

**4** Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

<sup>2</sup> “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?  
Yet who can keep from speaking?”

He delivers a brief message of praise, but it quickly turns into criticism:

<sup>3</sup> “Behold, you have instructed many,  
and you have strengthened the weak hands.

<sup>4</sup> Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,  
and you have made firm the feeble knees.

<sup>5</sup> But now it has come to you, and you are impatient;  
it touches you, and you are dismayed.  
<sup>6</sup> Is not your fear of God<sup>[a]</sup> your confidence,  
and the integrity of your ways your hope?"

Eliphaz then proceeds to explain suffering in verses 7-11:

<sup>7</sup> "Remember: who that was innocent ever perished?  
Or where were the upright cut off?  
<sup>8</sup> As I have seen, those who plow iniquity  
and sow trouble reap the same.  
<sup>9</sup> By the breath of God they perish,  
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed."

His description here is the extreme consequence for evil. Looking at his speech as a whole, it's clear that he believes Job to have committed some sin, and he needs to repent in order to receive God's blessing again.

Eliphaz adds a new element to his argument beginning in verse 12:

<sup>12</sup> "Now a word was brought to me stealthily;  
my ear received the whisper of it.  
<sup>13</sup> Amid thoughts from visions of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on men,  
<sup>14</sup> dread came upon me, and trembling,  
which made all my bones shake.  
<sup>15</sup> A spirit glided past my face;  
the hair of my flesh stood up.  
<sup>16</sup> It stood still,  
but I could not discern its appearance.  
A form was before my eyes;  
there was silence, then I heard a voice:  
<sup>17</sup> 'Can mortal man be in the right before<sup>[b]</sup> God?  
Can a man be pure before his Maker?  
<sup>18</sup> Even in his servants he puts no trust,  
and his angels he charges with error;  
<sup>19</sup> how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,  
whose foundation is in the dust,  
who are crushed like<sup>[c]</sup> the moth.'"

Exactly what this spirit was, we can't tell. Eliphaz is now trying to bolster his argument by adding divine revelation to what he has observed through experience (v.8). It's no surprise that Job, being a man, has sinned. He just needs to confess and forsake it to get right with God again.

At the beginning of Chapter 5, the harshness of Eliphaz's question is startling:

**5** "Call now; is there anyone who will answer you?  
To which of the holy ones will you turn?"

Here we have the first hint of a possible mediator between God and man. Most commentators hold that the term "holy ones" refers to angels. Eliphaz soundly and quickly rejects such a notion, but the idea of a mediator is one that Job will put forth in later chapters.

Eliphaz continues with a warning to Job that he risks ruin if he persists in the foolishness of his present distress:

**2** "Surely vexation kills the fool,  
and jealousy slays the simple.  
**3** I have seen the fool taking root,  
but suddenly I cursed his dwelling.  
**4** His children are far from safety;  
they are crushed in the gate,  
and there is no one to deliver them."

Then he provides the alternate and better solution by telling what course he would follow instead:

**8** "As for me, I would seek God,  
and to God would I commit my cause,  
**9** who does great things and unsearchable,  
marvelous things without number"

In verses 10-16, Eliphaz delivers an eloquent speech about the great wonders God performs on the earth and in the lives of men. Then he says that Job's suffering is God's discipline. He lists the gifts from God that Job will have again if he repents. But is Job really grieving the loss of those things most?

"The speaker seems serenely unconscious that he was saying anything that could drive a knife into the tortured man. He is so carried along on the waves of his own eloquence, and so absorbed in stringing together the elements of an artistic whole, that he forgets the very sorrows which he came to comfort." -Alexander Maclaren

It's good for us to keep in mind God's evaluation of Eliphaz and the comforters:

"My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is trustworthy, as My servant Job *has*." Job 42:7 (NASB)

In the final verse of Chapter 5, Eliphaz attempts to persuade Job by emphasizing the authority of all the counselors, who are in agreement.

<sup>27</sup> "Behold this; we have investigated it, *and* so it is. Hear it, and know for yourself." (NASB)

Another excellent insight from Maclaren:

"The speech ends with a somewhat self-complacent exhortation to the poor, tortured man: 'We have searched it, so it is.' We wise men pledge our wisdom and our reputation that this is true. Great is authority. An ounce of sympathy would have done more to commend the doctrine than a ton of dogmatic self-confidence."

### Job's response to Eliphaz, Chapters 6-7

**6** Then Job answered and said:

<sup>2</sup> "Oh that my vexation were weighed,  
and all my calamity laid in the balances!  
<sup>3</sup> For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea;  
therefore my words have been rash.  
<sup>4</sup> For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;  
my spirit drinks their poison;  
the terrors of God are arrayed against me."

It's immediately clear that Eliphaz's words have done nothing to convince Job that he is wrong. On the contrary, they have stirred up his grief and frustration all the more.

The meaning of Job's questions in verses 5 and 6 is that there is a legitimate reason for Job's distress.

In verses 8 and 9, Job repeats his desire that God would allow him to die. He still acknowledges God's sovereignty over life and death.

<sup>10</sup> "But it is still my comfort,  
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,  
That I have not <sup>[a]</sup>denied the words of the Holy One." (NASB)

Job maintains his innocence, and continues to reject Eliphaz's exhortation to repent.

In verses 11-13, Job expresses that he cannot endure much longer. His strength and flesh are inadequate and he sees no hope of deliverance.

In verse 14, Job turns his attention to his friends and their failure to comfort and help him.

Job uses the description of a wadi, a ravine or channel that is dry except during the rainy season, to describe his disappointment in his friends.

<sup>15</sup> "My brothers have acted deceitfully like a <sup>[a]</sup>wadi,  
Like the torrents of <sup>[b]</sup>wadis which drain away,  
<sup>16</sup> Which are darkened because of ice,  
And into which the snow <sup>[c]</sup>melts.  
<sup>17</sup> When they dry up, they vanish;  
When it is hot, they disappear from their place.  
<sup>18</sup> The <sup>[d]</sup>paths of their course wind along,  
They go up into wasteland and perish.  
<sup>19</sup> The caravans of Tema looked,  
The travelers of Sheba hoped for them.  
<sup>20</sup> They were put to shame, for they had trusted,  
They came there and were humiliated." (NASB)

Eliphaz is shocked that Job's fear of God does not sustain him in his grief, and Job can't understand why their fear of God does not lead them to be more compassionate toward him.

Job makes some pretty strong accusations against them in the remainder of this chapter. He also wants them to give proof of their accusations of wrongdoing on his part, saying that he will sit silently and listen if they will just give some kind of solid evidence against him.

Even though at this point it is only Eliphaz who has spoken, we can infer that the friends have somehow conveyed their agreement with him.

In Chapter 7, Job shifts to directing his speech to God in verse 7. Neither the 3 friends nor Elihu ever address God. He embarks on another long lament, but this one is different from the one in Chapter 3. He pours out his pain by bemoaning his physical agony and the hard lot he has in life now.

**7** "Has not man a hard service on earth,  
and are not his days like the days of a hired hand?  
**2** Like a slave who longs for the shadow,  
and like a hired hand who looks for his wages,  
**3** so I am allotted months of emptiness,  
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.  
**4** When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?'  
But the night is long,  
and I am full of tossing till the dawn.  
**5** My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt;  
my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh.  
**6** My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle  
and come to their end without hope.  
**7** "Remember that my life is a breath;  
my eye will never again see good.  
**8** The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more;  
while your eyes are on me, I shall be gone.  
**9** As the cloud fades and vanishes,  
so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up;  
**10** he returns no more to his house,  
nor does his place know him anymore."

The term for "hard service" is descriptive of military service.

The mention of months in verse 3 is a possible indicator of how long Job has been suffering.

It's interesting that he speaks of the passage of time in contrasting terms: the night is long, but the days pass quickly.

In verse 7, the statement that he will never again see good shows his hopelessness.

He is pleading for God's compassion and sympathy in telling Him that his life is a breath and that God will not see him anymore.

In verse 11, he declares his intent to continue to cry out without restraint. He does not hold back as he lashes out at God with charges against Him:

- 12 "Am I the sea, or a sea monster,  
that you set a guard over me?  
13 When I say, 'My bed will comfort me,  
my couch will ease my complaint,'  
14 then you scare me with dreams  
and terrify me with visions,  
15 so that I would choose strangling  
and death rather than my bones.  
16 I loathe my life; I would not live forever.  
Leave me alone, for my days are a breath.  
17 What is man, that you make so much of him,  
and that you set your heart on him,  
18 visit him every morning  
and test him every moment?  
19 How long will you not look away from me,  
nor leave me alone till I swallow my spit?"

Does God consider Job some kind of threat?

Job has no rest even in sleep. Death would be a welcome release.

Job wrongly views God as his tormentor; the reader knows better.

Verse 17 can sound similar to Psalm 8:4, but has a completely different meaning. Not, why does a great and majestic God bother with puny man, but why is God constantly scrutinizing man?

- 20 "Have I sinned? What have I done to You,  
Watcher of mankind?  
Why have You made me Your target,  
So that I am a burden to myself?  
21 Why then do You not forgive my wrongdoing  
And take away my <sup>[a]</sup>guilt?  
For now I will lie down in the dust;  
And You will search for me, but I will no *longer* exist."

Chapter 7 ends with a repeat of his appeal to God – that if God does not act soon, He will be sorry that He cannot see Job any longer.

## Chapter 8 – Bildad speaks

Bildad has been called the “voice of tradition.”

**8** Then Bildad the Shuhite responded,

**2** “How long will you say these things,  
And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind?

**3** Does God pervert justice?

Or does <sup>the</sup> Almighty pervert what is right?

**4** If your sons sinned against Him,

Then He turned them over to the <sup>the</sup> power of their wrongdoing.

**5** If you will search for God

And implore the compassion of <sup>the</sup> Almighty,

**6** If you are pure and upright

Surely now He will stir Himself for you

And restore your righteous <sup>the</sup> estate.

**7** Though your beginning was insignificant,

Yet your end will increase greatly.”

Bildad is angry and can only criticize. He makes no attempt to soothe or calm Job in his sorrow and distress.

Bildad’s theology in a nutshell: Sin leads to punishment, and God rewards the “pure and upright.” There is no other possibility.

At least in vv.5-7, we see some concern for Job as Bildad advises him to seek God and experience restoration.

Bildad urges Job to learn from the wisdom of those who have come before in verses 8-10.

Next, Bildad uses examples from nature to illustrate his view of spiritual truth:

**11** “Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh?

Can reeds flourish where there is no water?

**12** While yet in flower and not cut down,

they wither before any other plant.

- 13 Such are the paths of all who forget God;  
the hope of the godless shall perish.
- 14 His confidence is severed,  
and his trust is a spider's web.<sup>[a]</sup>
- 15 He leans against his house, but it does not stand;  
he lays hold of it, but it does not endure.
- 16 He is a lush plant before the sun,  
and his shoots spread over his garden.
- 17 His roots entwine the stone heap;  
he looks upon a house of stones.
- 18 If he is destroyed from his place,  
then it will deny him, saying, 'I have never seen you.' "

Those who forget God are like a reed that grows up quickly when it has sufficient water, but will wither quickly during times of drought.

He ends with what seem to be words of encouragement for Job:

- 20 "Behold, God will not reject a blameless man,  
nor take the hand of evildoers.
- 21 He will yet fill your mouth with laughter,  
and your lips with shouting.
- 22 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,  
and the tent of the wicked will be no more."

Just like Eliphaz, Bildad speaks some truths, but he is misapplying them in Job's case. He maintains that we can know who is trusting in God because they are prospering, and those who suffer are being judged for their wickedness.

Next week, Week Four:

Round One of the Debate, Part 2, study book p. 30, #4 to p. 34  
Job Chapters 9-14