

“Job’s lament (Job 3) is all the encouragement his three friends need to break their silence. The way the drama is set out, each of them—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—have a go at Job, trying to correct his theology and lead him to repentance. After each speaks, Job himself replies. Then the entire cycle is repeated, and starts to be repeated yet again. The third cycle sputters out with a short contribution from Bildad (25:1–6); Zophar never does contribute to the third round. By this time, Job is really indignant, and makes a lengthy speech (chaps. 26–31) that silences his interlocutors without convincing them” (Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Perspectives on Suffering and Evil*, 161).

4:1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied:

4:2 "If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking?"

4:3 Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands.

4:4 Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees.

4:5 But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed.

4:6 Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope?"

Eliphaz wants Job to be reasonable, to be open to discussion, and to remember the lessons that he himself had learned. He is very tactful and very respectful toward Job. He does not come looking for a fight. He does not come as Job’s enemy. His appeal is something like, “You know, Job, you have encouraged and instructed people. When necessary you have rebuked people. Now something has happened to you and maybe you need some correction. So as a friend let me speak to you.”

Eliphaz knows Job has lived a life that is absolutely above reproach, so he encourages him: “Job, don’t be dismayed over all that has happened to you. Your piety should be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope!” He wants Job to see a connection between the blessings he had received and his past righteousness.

As verses 7 and following make clear, he is expecting that Job will remember what he had believed about God for so many years and what he has experienced to be true. In addition, he wants Job to admit that he had done some evil that deserves the punishment he had received.

4:7 "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?"

4:8 As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.

4:9 At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.

4:10 The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken.

4:11 The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.

The heart of the three friends’ theological position is summed up by Eliphaz’s question: “Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?” The basic premise in verses 7–8 is that the innocent never suffer harm from God. So, if someone has terrible things happen to him, if he is beset by tragedy, if he suffers terrible loss, he cannot be innocent. If someone experiences trouble it must mean that he had plowed evil. The wicked are like vicious lions who are crushed by God (4:10, 11). This is the only explanation Job’s friends have for his suffering.

In short, Eliphaz is saying that the doctrine of retribution does not have exceptions; it always holds true, and since Job has the same theological world-view as his friends, Job should know this as well.

To summarize, Job and his friends believed that the reason people suffer is because they did something wrong. The reason people prosper is because they are righteous. This is *not* biblically correct, but it is the basic doctrine that is at the center of their thinking. This is how they explain the world. This is how they explain the injustice in the world. This is how they make sense of it all, but this is the very thing that has collapsed for Job. Job hadn't sinned; he hadn't done anything wrong, and yet he was suffering more than anyone.

**4:12 "Now a word was brought to me stealthily, And my ear received a whisper of it.
4:13 "Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, When deep sleep falls on men,
4:14 Dread came upon me, and trembling, And made all my bones shake.
4:15 "Then a spirit passed by my face; The hair of my flesh bristled up.
4:16 "It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; A form was before my eyes; There was silence, then I heard a voice:
4:17 'Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?
4:18 'He puts no trust even in His servants; And against His angels He charges error.
4:19 'How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, Whose foundation is in the dust, Who are crushed before the moth!
4:20 'Between morning and evening they are broken in pieces; Unobserved, they perish forever.
4:21 'Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them? They die, yet without wisdom.'**

“Reason alone is not enough for Eliphaz. He claims he learned the truths he enunciates in a vision of the night. The form that appeared to him asked, ‘Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be purer than his Maker?’ (4:17). In itself, of course, the question points to something important: we need to exercise humility when we approach God on these difficult questions. But Eliphaz applies it more strongly. Fools and reprobates are destroyed by God: he is so holy that he devours them while they scramble around in futility” (Carson, 162).

The real question is if the spirit in Eliphaz's vision was from God. It is true that none compare to God and if the angels are inferior to Him (4:18) how much more is man who dwells in houses of clay? Compared to God, man is nothing and man's existence is precarious at best; he is like a tent held up by a single rope (4:21); with little effort he collapses and is gone. *But the questions posed in verses 17–21 follow a path of truth that lead to error!*

**5:1 "Call if you will, but who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you turn?
5:2 Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.
5:3 I myself have seen a fool taking root, but suddenly his house was cursed.
5:4 His children are far from safety, crushed in court without a defender.
5:5 The hungry consume his harvest, taking it even from among thorns, and the thirsty pant after his wealth.
5:6 For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground.
5:7 Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.**

In chapter 4 Eliphaz has created a logical fallacy. He is assuming that if “A” is true, then “B” must also be true, but fails to realize that there are more options than just “B.” However, since Job thinks the same way as Eliphaz, it’s impossible for Job to refute him: “he must admit the premise but contradict the conclusion” (Andersen, 114). In the eyes of Eliphaz, Job is an unrepentant fool who has despised the chastening of the Almighty (cf. 5:17; Anderson 116; Alden, 90). Therefore, it is futile to try to find someone to help him gain a hearing before God (5:1). If he tried asking the angels (the holy ones) for help in mediating his claim, no one will answer. Who would argue the case of a fool before God?

In all of these speeches Job’s friends speak abstractly and in generalities, when in fact, they have a very specific point in mind. They will describe the fate of the wicked and the fool, but in doing so they will always use as examples things that relate to what happened to Job. Notice, for example, 5:3: “I myself have seen a fool taking root, but suddenly his house was cursed.” What happened to Job? His life was going along well, and then suddenly everything seemed cursed. Then in 5:4: “His children are far from safety, crushed in court without a defender.” In a literal, general sense, Eliphaz would be saying that the fool’s children suffer when they are taken into court since no one is there to defend them. However, this is analogous with Job’s children’s fate. God was not there to defend them when a great wind came that killed them. They suffered because Job was a fool. And then in 5:5: “The hungry consume his harvest, taking it even from among thorns, and the thirsty pant after his wealth.” This also happened to Job: the Chaldeans and Sabeans came and took his livestock (his wealth). Thus, in a veiled way, Eliphaz is saying, “Job, you are the fool. Everything that we have learned and taught about how evil people can prosper for a little time and then total disaster comes down upon them, is true of you.”

Verses 6 and 7 are difficult to understand, but may mean that hardships are inevitable, like sparks they fly up unavoidably (Andersen, 119).

5:8 "But if it were I, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him.

5:9 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

5:10 He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside.

5:11 The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

5:12 He thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success.

5:13 He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away.

5:14 Darkness comes upon them in the daytime; at noon they grope as in the night.

5:15 He saves the needy from the sword in their mouth; he saves them from the clutches of the powerful.

5:16 So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.

Chapters 1 and 2 make it abundantly clear that Eliphaz is wrong in thinking that the tragedies that Job is facing are the result of sin. Nevertheless, because Eliphaz cannot fathom any other reason for Job suffering, he appeals to Job to repent and turn to God who is unfailingly good (5:8–16). In essence, Eliphaz’s advice to Job is like saying, “I would recognize Him as the One who is also capable of restoring His people. I would shut my mouth, confess my sin, and plead for His deliverance” (Carson, 162).

What makes the Book of Job so difficult to understand is that there are things that people say that are completely true, there are things that are true but misapplied, and there are things that are wrong (at least exaggerated—see verses 17–27). In verses 8–17 the things that Eliphaz says are true. God is powerful. He is the One who sends the rain. God sees all that is done in the earth. He cares about the poor. He punishes the evil. What is wrong is that these things don’t fit this case. They are true, but they

are misapplied in this situation. We have seen from the prologue (chapters 1–2) that Job is not a wicked man who is being punished or disciplined (5:17).

5:17 "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.

5:18 For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.

5:19 From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you.

5:21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes.

5:22 You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth.

5:23 For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you.

5:24 You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing.

5:25 You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth.

5:26 You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season.

5:27 "We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself."

Eliphaz's message is that those whom God loves He reproves, and if they respond to His discipline, they will have perfect happiness (5: 17–26). If Job were to repent, everything will go well, and God will heal him and his life (5:18). To paraphrase, Eliphaz is saying to Job, "If you confess your sin, and plead God's goodness, you will find yourself restored to your former comforts. 'We have examined this, and it is true,' Eliphaz rather grandly proclaims. 'So hear it and apply it to yourself'" (5:17–19, 27; Carson, 162). Of course, the same problem persists: Eliphaz's advice doesn't apply to Job; Job isn't being disciplined by God. There is nothing of which he needs to repent.

All that Eliphaz predicts actually come true in Job's life. Toward the end of the Book of Job God *will* meet Job. Job *will* be healed. Job's suffering *will* come to an end. He will have his property restored. He will have children again. His life will be good again. But it is ironic because it doesn't happen the way Eliphaz expects. He expects Job to repent of some sin. Instead, Job comes to a new understanding about God and Eliphaz is rebuked.

Nevertheless, Eliphaz makes it sound like, if you just believe in God and obey what He says, your life will be absolutely blissful. You will have no problems. Is it really true that those who fear God have no anxiety at all?

- 5:21 You will be protected from gossip, slander, false accusations
- 5:21b–22a You will not fear ruin; You will laugh at destruction and famine (the opposite of fearing destruction or ruin)
- 5:23 You will be at peace with nature and the beasts of the earth
- 5:24 Your possessions will be secure; no one will steal anything from you
- 5:25 You will have numerous children—a big family
- 5:26 You will die having lived a long and fulfilling life

However, the Bible tells us that God promises to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. He does not promise we will never have to walk through the valley. He does not promise that we will never have times when we are suffering greatly. If nothing else, we can look to Jesus who suffered

enormously though he was perfectly righteous. We can also look at Paul, who gave his total life over to the service of God and yet suffered many hardships and had great concerns. Therefore, it is simply not true that those who are righteous have no troubles, or that disaster never strikes them, or that they are never worried or distressed.

So Eliphaz has again taken something which is essentially right and good and misuses it.

Finally, in 5:27, there is another appeal to reason. Job 4:7 and 5:27 form bookends for the entire speech in which Eliphaz is making an appeal to reason and experience. This is a literary device called *inclusio* (an inclusion structure), meaning that everything included between the “bookends” is part of the same theme. Namely, Eliphaz believes that reason and experience tell us that Job must have sinned.

IN SUM:

What we have seen thus far in the speech of Eliphaz is that he began very tactfully. He intended to help. He didn't come to afflict Job. However, he does see Job as one of the fools who is being afflicted by God for some sin he had committed. He rightly speaks of God, though in this case he misapplies the truths he espouses and he exaggerates how the righteous live, implying that they never have trouble, fear, or anxiety. For these reasons we must take extreme care in reading the Book and always keep in mind that not all that is said is correct or correctly applied.

We should be clear that the Bible does teach that we reap what we sow and we will be judged for our deeds.

- Galatians 6:7: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”
- Matthew 16:27: “For the Son of Man is going to come . . . and then He will repay each person according to what he has done.”
- 2 Corinthians 5:10: “each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

However, there is not always a direct correspondence between our sin and the things we experience as Job and his friends believed. Both the wicked and the righteous face suffering, pain, and trials.

Matthew 5:10 says, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.”

1 Peter 2:20 says, “if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”

Furthermore, the wicked are not always judged for their sin, but receive grace instead. In Matthew 5:45 Jesus said of God: “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Paul also said to the unbelieving in Acts 14:17 that God does good by giving them rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying their hearts with food and gladness.

On top of that, there are times when we as Christians are disciplined. Hebrews 12:6 says, “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (also Job 5:17). God uses adversity to build godliness and reveal weaknesses. James 1:2–4 says, “Consider it all joy, my brethren,

when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Thus, we cannot interpret what happens in our lives through the lens of retributive justice as Job and his friends did. At times we reap what we sow. At times we receive grace even though we have sinned. At times we suffer for righteousness. At times we are being disciplined. In some cases, there is a direct correlation between what we do and what happens to us; other times there is not. In the end, the wicked will be judged and the righteous will receive their due reward, but the reason for suffering or trials in our lives is not always apparent.

This, of course, is critical to grasp if we are to understand the gospel. If God functioned as Eliphaz claimed, then Christ’s suffering and death would have been evidence that He was experiencing the disfavor of God. If He had sinned, He could not be the spotless Lamb of God and His death could not be a substitute for sin.

Secondly, the gospel makes it clear that no one, in and of themselves, is good enough to deserve the blessing of God. Romans 3:10–12 says, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Everyone needs grace. If we could merit God’s favor, we would not need the cross.