

WHAT DID ELIPHAZ SAY ABOUT JOB?

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In our Bible study on the book of Job, in the first round of dialogue between Job and his three friends, we found Job completely devastated: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. When he begins to speak in Job chapter 3, he is in the middle of the dark night of the soul.

In the responses of Job's friends, we see in their advice there is a lot of true, but it is grounded in some false assumptions, they believe that Job is suffering because of some sin. Eliphaz believed it was personal sin on the part of Job. Bildad suggested that it was because of sin on the part of Job's family. Zophar believed it was because Job allowed injustice in his dealings, his business endeavors. The three friends point out truths that all of these things can lead to judgment in our lives.

Job responds to all of these charges, insisting on his innocence. Job chapter 15 starts another round of responses from Job's friends. In their first dialogue, I think we see that the friends are making suggestions, but they become more strident in their second round.

15 Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,

2 "Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge
And fill himself with the east wind?

3 "Should he argue with useless talk,
Or with words which are not profitable?

Eliphaz doesn't believe Job, he is sure that Job has sinned. And the answer to his question, should one respond to someone who they think knows everything ... I think the answer to that is no. After a couple of responses, if a person won't budge, leave them where they're at.

4 "Indeed, you do away with reverence
And hinder meditation before God.

5 "For your guilt teaches your mouth,
And you choose the language of the crafty.

6 "Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;

And your own lips testify against you.

Eliphaz is twisting Job's words and he also has misconceptions about God and our relationship to him. Eliphaz and Bildad had advised Job in their first speeches to Job to present his case before God because he will vindicate the righteous . . . yet when Job does, he is accused of irreverence. Eliphaz seems to think Job should go to God, but have no conversation with him. Job has said that he is willing to have any sin he may have committed revealed to him, but yet Eliphaz accuses him of speaking from guilt.

7 "Were you the first man to be born,
Or were you brought forth before the hills?
8 "Do you hear the secret counsel of God,
And limit wisdom to yourself?
9 "What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that we do not?

I think we see some resentment here on the part of Eliphaz. He has come to Job in his time of need ... but Job doesn't seem to appreciate that fact. Eliphaz had what he believed to be a special revelation about the situation, but Job doesn't support or agree with his conclusion. So Eliphaz is mad.

10 "Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,
Older than your father.
11 "Are the consolations of God too small for you,
Even the word spoken gently with you?

12 "Why does your heart carry you away?
And why do your eyes flash,
13 That you should turn your spirit against God
And allow such words to go out of your mouth?

Eliphaz thinks that because Job doesn't agree with his words and advice, that Job is "turn[ing] [his] spirit against God." Job isn't. He is just rejecting Eliphaz's words and recognizing the false foundation that Eliphaz is starting from.

I think we see that a lot. Just as Eliphaz was wrong in his assumptions, so spiritual leaders today can be wrong. A person isn't rejecting God because of the words that leader or authority says . . . they are just rejecting the person's words.

This is an example of "projection" where Eliphaz is accusing Job of the

things he is doing himself.¹ It is here that Eliphaz moves from misguided advice into abuse. As we will see in some of his comments later in the chapter, he throws in some low blows referring to Job's losses and directly equating Job with the wicked.

14 "What is man, that he should be pure,
Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?
15 "Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones,
And the heavens are not pure in His sight;
16 How much less one who is detestable and corrupt,
Man, who drinks iniquity like water!

From maligning Job, Eliphaz moves on to maligning God. It is true that no one is truly righteous; however, Eliphaz does not understand God's great love for both his creation and his imagers.

The picture Eliphaz paints is a paranoid Almighty that trusts no one and who is displeased in everything. That is not the case. As David writes in Psalm 8 "who is man that thou are mindful of him."² Creation itself displays God's splendor.³ It is evidence of God's greatness and goodness that he shows compassion on man and the magnificence of creation is a reflection of God's own greatness, drawing man closer to him.

17 "I will tell you, listen to me;
And what I have seen I will also declare;
18 What wise men have told,
And have not concealed from their fathers,

¹ "Projection – APA Dictionary of Psychology," accessed August 16, 2021, <https://dictionary.apa.org/projection>.

Projection: in psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories, the process by which one attributes one's own individual positive or negative characteristics, affects, and impulses to another person or group. This is often a [defense mechanism](#) in which unpleasant or unacceptable impulses, stressors, ideas, affects, or responsibilities are attributed to others. For example, the defense mechanism of projection enables a person conflicted over expressing anger to change "I hate him" to "He hates me." Such defensive patterns are often used to justify prejudice or evade responsibility; in more severe cases, they may develop into paranoid delusions in which, for example, an individual who blames others for his or her problems may come to believe that those others are plotting against him or her. In classical psychoanalytic theory, projection permits the individual to avoid seeing his or her own faults, but modern usage has largely abandoned the requirement that the projected trait remain unknown in the self.

² Psalm 8:4

³ Psalm 8:1

19 To whom alone the land was given,
And no alien passed among them.

Eliphaz very obviously wants to be recognized as an authority and draws on the wisdom of his people. As we saw in our study of chapter 11 and Zophar's first response, *Lockyer's* explanation of the advice of Job's friends was that Eliphaz represents "human experience or history."⁴

Eliphaz wants Job to concede to this wisdom from human experience; however, while we can draw guidance from our history and human experience, putting sole trust in that human perspective is idolatry. Even the most astute and objective historical observer is not going to know all the factors at play. They will not know how God is working behind the scenes or the hidden motivations of people's hearts. That testimony of human experience will always just give us a piece of the puzzle, it can't give us the whole picture.

20 "The wicked man writhes in pain all his days,
And numbered are the years stored up for the ruthless.
21 "Sounds of terror are in his ears;
While at peace the destroyer comes upon him.

Sometimes this is true, but sometimes, as multiple Biblical writers have pointed out ... sometimes it seems that the wicked prosper.⁵

22 "He does not believe that he will return from darkness,
And he is destined for the sword.
23 "He wanders about for food, saying, 'Where is it?'
He knows that a day of darkness is at hand.
24 "Distress and anguish terrify him,
They overpower him like a king ready for the attack,

Again, Eliphaz's response is a mixture of truth and error. It is true that the wicked often operate with hubris and believe that they will never be called to account. It is true that the wicked cannot have true peace of mind and soul and always have to be on guard.

25 Because he has stretched out his hand against God
And conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty.
26 "He rushes headlong at Him

⁴ "Zophar," *Lockyer's All the Men of the Bible*, accessed August 6, 2021, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-men-bible/Zophar>.

⁵ Jeremiah 12:1, Psalm 37:7, Job 21:7

With his massive shield.

The wicked, those rebelling against God, trust in their own strength and might, their own resources. But in the end, they will come to ruin. The *NET Study Bible* notes that the reference to “the outstretched hand is the picture of attempting to strike someone or shaking a fist at someone; it is a symbol of a challenge or threat.⁶” Verse 26 has had a little bit of a varied translation. According to the NSB, the statement “he rushes headlong against Him” is taken to mean by the RSV as “with a stiff neck” the meaning is that it is a “headlong assault on God.⁷” The NASB translates the remainder of verse 26 as “with his massive shield.” The NET translate it as “with a thick, strong shield,” noting that the verse is referring to the bosses of the shield which are “the convex side of the bucklers turned against the foe. This is a defiant attack on God.⁸”

27 “For he has covered his face with his fat
And made his thighs heavy with flesh.

28 “He has lived in desolate cities,
In houses no one would inhabit,
Which are destined to become ruins.

If you want an example of throwing shade in the ancient world, this is it. This stanza is describing someone who has lived in comfort and ease, living off the effort of others without having to do any work himself. Before disaster struck, Job was the wealthiest man in the entire area. I think we see here that Eliphaz is making assumptions about Job’s life and how he behaved. Not only is Eliphaz maligning Job, but he is also mocking him. The NSB notes on verse 27 that it is pointing out that “he is not in any condition to fight, because he is bloated and fat from luxurious living.⁹”

The “houses no one would inhabit” are referring to houses that were destroyed by judgment, cursed places. Again from the *NET Study Bible*, “these are not cities that he, the wicked, has destroyed, but that were destroyed by a judgment on wickedness . . . The wicked man is willing to risk such a curse in his confidence in his prosperity.¹⁰”

29 “He will not become rich, nor will his wealth endure;
And his grain will not bend down to the ground.

⁶ NET Full Notes Study Bible, Job 15, note N.

⁷ NET Full Notes Study Bible, Job 15, note P.

⁸ NET Full Notes Study Bible, Job 15,, note Q.

⁹ NET Full Notes Study Bible, Job 15, note R.

¹⁰ NET Full Notes Study Bible, Job 15, note U.

30 “He will not escape from darkness;
The flame will wither his shoots,
And by the breath of His mouth he will go away.

31 “Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself;
For emptiness will be his reward.
32 “It will be accomplished before his time,
And his palm branch will not be green.

33 “He will drop off his unripe grape like the vine,
And will cast off his flower like the olive tree.
34 “For the company of the godless is barren,
And fire consumes the tents of the corrupt.

35 “They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity,
And their mind prepares deception.”

This entire section appears to be attacks and accusation against Job and his family. Verse 29, “he will not become rich, nor his wealth endure,” Job had everything, but lost it all. The reference to “his grain will not bend down to the ground” is saying that his wealth, and perhaps his seed (children) will not fully ripen or come to fruition.

“Shoots” often refer to offspring in the Bible, and when Eliphaz is saying that “by the breath of His [God’s] mouth he will go away,” he is probably referring to the wind that collapsed the house where Job’s children were.

When Eliphaz says “his palm branch will not be green,” he is again taking a swipe at the death of Job’s children. Palm trees were identified with fertility in the Ancient Near East. The tree symbolizes generations where many fronds come from a single trunk.¹¹ Eliphaz is saying Job’s palm branch will not become green. The mention of grapes and the flower of the olive tree are also references to fruitfulness and fertility, which Eliphaz is saying will drop before the fullness of time. Eliphaz concludes that the “company of the godless is barren,” and at this moment, that describes Job.

It is true that in the end ... no one gets away with anything. But at times, the wicked do become rich and seem to prosper. But Eliphaz does not even seem to take into consideration that Job is not at fault. He is equating Job with the wicked.

¹¹ Irit Ziffer, “WESTERN ASIATIC TREE-GODDESSES,” *Ägypten und Levante / Egypt and the Levant* 20 (2010): 411.

So what are your thoughts about Eliphaz's second response to Job?

I think what we're seeing here is a revelation of Eliphaz's heart and motivations. In his first dialogue to Job, he is showing compassion, he gives some good advice and points out that personal sin can bring judgment, and he believes that is the case because of this supernatural (whatever the source) revelation into the situation.

Does he have true concern for Job and is he truly interested in getting to the truth of Job's specific situation, or does he see this as an opportunity to put himself in a position of authority.

The mighty (Job) has fallen.

Eliphaz had already made up his mind by the time he came to Job, before he had even heard a word Job said, what brought about Job's fall.

Eliphaz thinks he's going to come in as a person with wise counsel, one who enlightens the situation . . . and that isn't what happens is it? So we see in chapter 15 Eliphaz's true character shining through. His resentment of Job is obvious and he becomes spiteful and condemning.

Don't Be Eliphaz

I think the takeaway from this chapter is the same one from Zophar's first response to God . . . Don't think that you know all the circumstances of the situation. Even if you are closer to a situation than Job's friends would have been, you still don't know everything that is going on. As we see in the book of Job, even Job didn't know all of the dynamics in play and it was his own life.

Showing Grace

If you recognize bits of yourself in Eliphaz . . . Bitterness and resentment because someone experiencing misfortune won't acknowledge a wrong and a lack of compassion for the person in front of you . . . Confess that to God and ask him to give you a "clean heart" and eyes that can see the other person as he sees them.

Even if there is true wrong, we have to be willing to forgive . . . To show grace. Grace is unmerited, undeserved favor. We get a break we do not deserve. Jesus said that we will be judged by the same standard we judge others.¹² So the question is do you want that break given, grace shown, when you need it?

¹² Matthew 7:1-2

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