

The Book of Job

Lesson 4: Eliphaz Speaks and Job Replies -- Job 4:1–7:21

The silence is over now. Job has poured out his anguish, and one of his friends can hold his tongue no longer. Eliphaz the Temanite clears his throat and begins to speak, and at first he sounds gentle, even reluctant. If one tries to speak with you, he says, will you be weary of it? He remembers, he says, how Job once strengthened weak hands and steadied stumbling knees, how Job's own words had held up many a fainting soul. It is a kind beginning. But there is a turn coming, and it is a turn that will shape the rest of this book.

For Eliphaz has a theory, and he is sure of it. He believes, as devoutly as he believes anything, that the innocent never perish and that those who plow trouble reap it. In other words, suffering is the harvest of sin. If you are in agony, Eliphaz reasons, then somewhere, somehow, you must have sown the seed of it. He even claims a vision in the night to back him up, a spirit that glided past his face and made his hair stand on end and whispered that no mortal is pure before God. From all of this he draws his pastoral conclusion: Job, examine yourself, for God does not punish the blameless.

And so the great drama of the book begins. We readers know what Eliphaz does not. We were in the throne room in chapters 1 and 2; we heard God Himself call Job blameless and upright. We know that Job's suffering is not the harvest of secret sin. So we listen to Eliphaz's confident theology with a growing ache, because it is wrong, and its wrongness is about to be poured, like salt, into the deepest wound a man has ever carried. This belief, that suffering always proves sin, is the very thing God will rebuke at the end of the book (Job 42:7).

Job's reply, in chapters 6 and 7, is one of the most raw and human passages in all of Scripture. My anguish, he cries, is heavier than the sand of the sea. He feels the arrows of the Almighty within him. He turns on his friends, calling them a dry streambed that promised water and delivered nothing to a thirsty caravan. And then he turns to God with a question that has trembled on the lips of sufferers ever since: What is man, that You make so much of him, that You visit him every morning and test him every moment? Sit with these chapters honestly. Here begins the argument that the whole book exists to answer.

Group Discussion: Eliphaz was certain that Job's suffering proved hidden sin; where do we see this same assumption at work in the church today, and why is it so dangerous to those who are already hurting?

Personal Reflection: Think of a time you were suffering and someone offered an explanation that wounded rather than helped; how can that memory make you a more careful comforter of others?

Read Job 4:1–7:21

Study Questions

1. Eliphaz argues that the innocent never perish and that suffering is the harvest of sin (Job 4:7–8); what is wrong with this retribution theology, and how does the rest of Scripture, including the words of the Lord Jesus, correct it?
2. Eliphaz reminds Job that he once strengthened weak hands and steadied stumbling knees (4:3–4); when has someone strengthened you in a hard time, and how might the Lord use you to do the same for someone now?
3. Eliphaz bases his counsel on a frightening night vision and a whispering spirit (4:12–21); how should we test claims of private revelation, and why is the written Word our safe and sufficient guide?
4. Job says his friends have become like a deceptive brook that fails the thirsty traveler (6:15–20); have you ever felt let down by people you counted on in a crisis, and what does Job teach you about where to finally place your hope?
5. Job cries that the arrows of the Almighty are in him (6:4) and openly questions God in chapter 7; what does it mean that Scripture preserves such raw words, and what does it teach us about how God receives our honest pain?

6. Eliphaz spoke true things in a wrong way at a wrong time (much of 4–5 is sound in the abstract); when have you been tempted to say something technically correct that would still wound a hurting person, and how can you grow in timing and tenderness?
7. In 7:17–18 Job turns the language of Psalm 8 inside out, asking why God makes so much of man only to test him every moment; what does this anguished question reveal about how suffering can distort our view of God, and how does the whole counsel of Scripture answer it?
8. Job longs for rest and even for death to end his pain (7:13–16); when life has felt unbearable to you, what has helped you hold on, and how can the church be a refuge for those in that place?
9. The friends' belief that suffering always proves personal sin and prosperity always proves righteousness is the very error God rebukes in Job 42:7 and the Lord Jesus denies in John 9:1–3; lay out carefully why this simplistic view is false, and what the Bible teaches instead about the meaning of human suffering.
10. Looking back across Eliphaz's speech and Job's reply, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through this passage, whether in how you suffer, how you speak to sufferers, or how you trust God's hidden purposes.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 9:1–3, the Lord Jesus directly denies that the man’s blindness was caused by his or his parents’ sin; Luke 13:1–5, Jesus warns against assuming that those who suffered disaster were worse sinners; Job 42:7, God’s verdict that Eliphaz and his friends did not speak rightly while Job did; James 5:10–11, the patience of Job held up as an example of the Lord’s compassion and mercy; Romans 12:15, the simple command to weep with those who weep

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