



Job - Chapter Fifteen

II Job 3:1-42:6 - Dialogue: Job, His Suffering, and His Standing before God (continues)

II.b Job 4:1-25:6 - The Friends and Job: Can Job be Right Before God? (continues)

Summary of Chapter Fifteen

In his second response, which initiates the second round of dialogues, Eliphaz dispenses with his earlier commendation of Job's character, refer back to Job 4:3-6, and opens by accusing him of speaking out of iniquity rather than wisdom (vv.2-16). The second half of the response is a more aggressive assertion of the content of Eliphaz's first speech: the consequence of wickedness is suffering, and thus suffering indicates that a person is wicked and should not protest innocence (vv.17-35).

II.b.ii Job 15:1-21:34 - The Second Cycle

The positions established by each participant harden in the second round of speeches. Once again Eliphaz (Chapter 15), Bildad (Chapter 18), and Zophar (Chapter 20) align Job's suffering with the punishment due to the wicked. Job's responses in Chapters 16-17, Chapter 19 and Chapter 21 typically show his refusal to accept responsibility for his situation, e.g. Job 19:2-6, and characterise the wicked not as sufferers but as those who prosper despite their careless godlessness, e.g. Job 21:7-16.

II.b.ii.1 Job 15:1-35 - Eliphaz Speaks: Job Undermines Religion

Refer to the chapter summary above.

- 1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:
- 2 'Should the wise answer with windy knowledge,

- and fill themselves with the east wind?
- ³ Should they argue in unprofitable talk,
or in words with which they can do no good?
- ⁴ But you are doing away with the fear of God,
and hindering meditation before God.
- ⁵ For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
and you choose the tongue of the crafty.
- ⁶ Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
your own lips testify against you.

Job 15:1-6

Should the wise answer with windy knowledge? It is possible that Eliphaz is asking whether he, as a wise man, should respond to Job, but the contents of vv.3-6 indicate that the function of this question is to dispute Job's claim to be wise; refer to Job 12:3 and 13:2. Eliphaz argues that Job's words reveal someone who is full of wind rather than wisdom. Eliphaz was clearly not impressed by Job's eloquent dependence on God as expressed in the previous chapters. He replied with a sharp rebuke of Job, accusing him of empty knowledge, of unprofitable talk, and of having cast off fear.

Or in words with which they can do no good. Eliphaz sought to discourage Job from his self-defence, perhaps saying, "It isn't doing any good, Job. We aren't listening to you. You are not persuading us."

The fear of God. The Hebrew lacks the words of God. However, the reference to God in the second half of the verse and the thrust of vv.2-6 underscore that this is precisely what Eliphaz is inferring: Job has become careless in his complaint to God and is doing away with the very thing that will bring him relief (namely, repentance and humility before God) and thus is hindering his meditation from being heard. Eliphaz was wrong in his judgement of Job; although Eliphaz could not see Job's secret prayer life, he was a man of piety and prayer as Job 1:1-22 clearly demonstrates.

And hindering meditation before God. Nevertheless, some people do hinder meditation or restrain prayer before God. Charles Spurgeon considered ways that some do this:

- Some restrain prayer before God because they do not pray often or regularly.

- Some restrain prayer before God because they do not prepare their hearts properly to pray. They do not consider who they are praying to, the way their prayer should be made, that they are sinners, what they should ask of God, and thankful for what he has done in the past.
- Some restrain prayer before God because they pray in such a formal, strict manner that they never really pour out their heart before God.
- Some restrain prayer before God because they pray with little faith and much unbelief.

Your own mouth condemns you, and not I. Eliphaz insisted that Job was also condemning himself more every time he spoke. This is because in the perspective of Job’s friends, the only words Job should speak are words of humble repentance for the sin that put him in this place.

7 ‘Are you the firstborn of the human race?
Were you brought forth before the hills?

8 Have you listened in the council of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?

9 What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that is not clear to us?

10 The grey-haired and the aged are on our side,
those older than your father.

11 Are the consolations of God too small for you,
or the word that deals gently with you?

12 Why does your heart carry you away,
and why do your eyes flash,

13 so that you turn your spirit against God,
and let such words go out of your mouth?

Job 15:7-13

Are you the firstborn of the human race? This is literally, “Were you born before Adam?” Eliphaz seems to be implying that Job sees himself as born in the righteous state of first man before the fall, i.e. pure, free from the sin and shame that was yet to come on him and all humanity.

Were you brought forth before the hills? Eliphaz argued along similar lines as God later did with Job in Chapters 38 and 39. They both appealed to Job to consider

that he did not know as much as he thought he did. Yet, what Eliphaz thought Job did not know was entirely different than what God knew Job did not know.

Have you listened in the council of God? The question ought to appear ironic to the reader, who has been made privy to the conversations represented in the prologue in Job 1:7-12 and 2:2-6. Eliphaz is himself guilty of the very sort of presumption for which he criticises Job: he has concluded wrongly that Job's suffering is a transparent indicator of God's judgement.

What do you know that we do not know? Job could not claim to be the first man who was born, or could not claim he was made before the hills, or claim that he had heard the counsel of God. Yet Job could rightly claim to know more than his friends did of his situation. They 'knew' Job was a particular and notorious sinner who needed to repent; Job knew that he was not, and that there must be some other reason for his crisis.

Are the consolations of God too small for you? It is important to remember that Eliphaz considered the consolations of God to be his advice and that of his friends. He assumed that if Job rejected their advice, he was rejecting God's consolations. Therefore, he thought that Job had turned his spirit against God.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "However wrong Eliphaz may have been in reference to Job and in reference to him, his remarks were grossly unjust - yet many of them are correct in themselves, and may usefully be applied to our own hearts. Inasmuch as Eliphaz, in this verse, teaches no doctrine, but only asks two searching questions, he cannot mislead us; but he may do us good service." Spurgeon also suggested what some of the consolations of God that are considered by some to be too small and neglected or rejected:

- The consolations of God are applied by the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter.
- Jesus is the substance of these consolations, for he is called <<*the consolation of Israel*>> (Luke 2:25b).
- The consolations of God deal with the problem of sin; its guilt and stain and power.
- The consolations of God assure Christians of a new heart and nature.
- The consolations of God reveal a reason for sorrow that remains.
- The consolations of God shows people someone who suffers with them; Jesus Christ: <<*Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested*>> (Hebrews 2:18).
- The consolations of God compensate his people for all their trials and sufferings.
- The consolations of God tell Christians of their heavenly destination and eternal hope.

14 What are mortals, that they can be clean?
Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?
15 God puts no trust even in his holy ones,
and the heavens are not clean in his sight;
16 how much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
one who drinks iniquity like water!

Job 15:14-16

What are mortals, that they can be clean? Eliphaz revisits the central questions of his first response in Job 4:17-21: if God does not fully trust even his heavenly servants, how can Job, as a mere mortal, continue to protest his innocence? Job and his friends have already argued over this point, with Zophar among others accusing Job of claiming to be pure and clean: <<***For you say, “My conduct is pure, and I am clean in God’s sight”***>> (Job 11:4). Job’s own admissions of sin have only managed to persuade his friends that, not only is he a sinner in a general sense, but he must also be one in a particular and wicked sense.

How much less one who is abominable and corrupt. Eliphaz seems to have the angels in mind with the reference to holy ones. If God puts no trust even in his holy ones, then it is entirely logical that he has even less confidence in man, who drinks iniquity like water.

17 ‘I will show you; listen to me;
what I have seen I will declare —
18 what sages have told,
and their ancestors have not hidden,
19 to whom alone the land was given,
and no stranger passed among them.
20 The wicked writhe in pain all their days,
through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless.
21 Terrifying sounds are in their ears;
in prosperity the destroyer will come upon them.
22 They despair of returning from darkness,
and they are destined for the sword.

23 They wander abroad for bread, saying, "Where is it?"
They know that a day of darkness is ready at hand;
24 distress and anguish terrify them;
they prevail against them, like a king prepared for battle.
25 Because they stretched out their hands against God,
and bid defiance to the Almighty,
26 running stubbornly against him
with a thick-bossed shield;
27 because they have covered their faces with their fat,
and gathered fat upon their loins,
28 they will live in desolate cities,
in houses that no one should inhabit,
houses destined to become heaps of ruins;
29 they will not be rich, and their wealth will not endure,
nor will they strike root in the earth;
30 they will not escape from darkness;
the flame will dry up their shoots,
and their blossom will be swept away by the wind.
31 Let them not trust in emptiness, deceiving themselves;
for emptiness will be their recompense.
32 It will be paid in full before their time,
and their branch will not be green.
33 They will shake off their unripe grape, like the vine,
and cast off their blossoms, like the olive tree.
34 For the company of the godless is barren,
and fire consumes the tents of bribery.
35 They conceive mischief and bring forth evil
and their heart prepares deceit.'

Job 15:17-35

What I have seen I will declare – what sages have told. Again, Job's friends appeal to the idea of tradition and 'all the wise people know this.' They speak in terms of cause and effect associations between human wickedness and received judgement, and assume that this principle is always true in all cases - especially in Job's particular case. When once the sledge-hammer of tradition is brought to bear there is nothing more to say. The Pharisees adopted this method with Jesus. The 'Eliphaz' method has hindered more souls in developing the life with God than almost any other thing.

In a section intended to function like the description of the foolish man in his first response in Job 5:2-5, Eliphaz portrays the wicked man to implicate Job. Central to the portrayal are the images of one who is terrified as judgement comes to him amid his seeming prosperity. Eliphaz is hoping that Job will see himself in the images and turn from defending himself to repentance.

Because they stretched out their hands against God, and bid defiance to the Almighty. By association, Eliphaz clearly accuses Job of this arrogance and defiance; of virtually attacking God, i.e. running stubbornly against him with a thick-bossed shield.

Because they have covered their faces with their fat, and gathered fat upon their loins, they will live in desolate cities, in houses that no one should inhabit, houses destined to become heaps of ruins. Being fat in that world was not objectionable. It was the proof of prosperity. Here Eliphaz was admitting that the wicked do prosper; but as he said in v.29, 'their wealth will not endure.' However, the doubled use of fat invokes a well-known image for proud, complacent disregard of God: <<*And he has shrivelled me up, which is a witness against me; my leanness has risen up against me, and it testifies to my face*>> (Job 16:8), <<*Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies*>> (Psalm 73:7), and: <<*Their hearts are fat and gross, but I delight in your law*>> (Psalm 119:70). Eliphaz poetically explained that the wicked may seem to succeed for a while, just as Job had, but their success is only an illusion: <<*For you say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." You do not realise that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked*>> (Revelation 3:17). They actually are lonely, poor and in darkness, a true description of Job's present state.

These verses contain an example of Job's claim that his friends are 'withholding kindness' from him; refer back to Job 6:14 and 12:5. With the presumption that his perspective is clear and right, Eliphaz mercilessly chooses vocabulary that focuses on the loss of Job's offspring as indication of God's judgement: emptiness, their branch will not be green, the early loss of grape or blossom, his company is barren, and conceive, bring forth or give birth, and heart or womb. Given what

the reader knows about Job, this section ought to instil humility on the part of any person who seeks to pursue another with rebuke – and compassion for Job as one who endured not only the loss of his children but also the presumptuous, compounded, and condemning comfort of his friends.

They conceive mischief and bring forth evil and their heart prepares deceit. In this indirect manner, Eliphaz accuses Job of all kinds of sin including hypocrisy, bribery, trouble-making, and lying. Adam Clarke comments, “Poor Job! What a fight of affliction had he to contend with! His body wasted and tortured with sore disease, his mind harassed by Satan; and his heart wrung with the unkindness, and false accusations of his friends. No wonder he was greatly agitated, often distracted, and sometimes even thrown off his guard. However, all his enemies were chained; and beyond that chain they could not go. God was his unseen Protector, and did not suffer his faithful servant to be greatly moved.”