



## Job - Chapter Twenty Two

### **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 Twenty Two**

In his final speech, launching the uniquely shaped third cycle, Eliphaz revisits earlier themes with renewed fervour and finality: he questions whether Job has any basis to lament before God (vv.2-4), asserts again that Job's circumstances reveal his abundant evil (vv.4-11), compares Job's words to those of the wicked (vv.12-20), and calls him once more to repent so that he might find his ways established by God (vv.21-30).

#### **II.b.iii Job 22:1-25:6 - The Third Cycle**

The consistent pattern of the first two cycles unravels in this last dialogue. In Chapter 22 Eliphaz begins by depicting Job's life as a constant stream of wicked activity, in contrast to the perception Job offered in his first speech in Job 4:6-7. Job's reply in Chapters 23-24 strongly implies that the divine power that has touched him is typically capricious and destructive. Bildad offers the beginning of a reply in the six verses of Chapter 25 before Job interrupts with a further assertion of the impenetrable mystery of divine power in Chapter 26, beginning Job's final reply to his friends. No room appears in this cycle for a contribution from Zophar. If there was any comfort in the friends' attending Job, it has entirely evaporated. The two parties have argued themselves increasingly apart, revisiting earlier judgements as they do so.

#### **II.b.iii.1 Job 22:1-30 - Eliphaz Speaks: Job's Wickedness Is Great**

Refer to the chapter summary above.

<sup>1</sup> Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered:

<sup>2</sup> ‘Can a mortal be of use to God?

Can even the wisest be of service to him?

<sup>3</sup> Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous,  
or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?

### Job 22:1-3

Eliphaz opens his response with three rhetorical questions that ask Job whether it makes any sense that God would bring suffering on one who is wise (v.2), blameless (v.3), or who fears him (v.4). Eliphaz argues that, since wisdom is profitable for the person and not somehow profitable for God (vv.2-3), there could be no purpose for suffering other than to indicate judgement and a need to repent (v.4). In framing his response this way, Eliphaz inverts Job’s own earlier reasoning that any sin of his could be of no consequence to so great a God (Job 7:20). He also continues to assert that Job’s circumstances on earth are transparent and exhaustive indicators that can and ought to be read only as signs of God’s judgement.

### Can a mortal be of use to God? Can even the wisest be of service to him?

Eliphaz heard all of Job’s anguished outpourings to God and seemed to think that Job simply thought too highly of himself. He wondered why Job thought he was so special, so profitable to God and why he thought God owed him so much.

It is the now familiar unbalanced stress on divine transcendence: the concept that man is nothing in God’s eyes, even his virtue is useless. God does not need man; it is man who needs God. Since everything has its origin in God, man’s giving it back - even in service - does not enhance God in any way. Is he not simply arguing the case for the self-sufficiency of God? God needs nothing; God lacks nothing. Since God is already absolutely perfect, he did not create man out of any personal deficiency or compulsion, and therefore man cannot give anything to God. This is standard orthodox doctrine as stated by Paul in Athens: <<*The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things*>> (Acts 17:24-25).

### Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?

Eliphaz thought Job was arrogant and believed himself to be a special favourite to God because he thought that he was so righteous. He wanted Job to consider that God needed nothing from him, and Job added nothing to God. In one aspect Eliphaz certainly had correct theology; God does not ‘need’ Job in the way Job needed God. Nevertheless, Eliphaz’s

application of this principle was wrong in this context because it was indeed a pleasure to the Almighty that Job was righteous as seen in Job Chapters 1-2. According to those first two chapters, it was indeed a gain to the Lord that Job made his ways blameless.

Earlier, as recorded in Job Chapter 11, Zophar objected to Job's complaint on what one might today call the grounds of Calvinistic or Reformed theology. Here, Eliphaz took up an argument upon similar lines. It was as if he said, "Job, God is sovereign and self-existent. He needs nothing of you and owes you absolutely nothing. God takes no pleasure in your imperfect righteousness and it is no gain to him that you are considered blameless." Although there is certainly some merit in this theology, it does not apply to every context and it did not apply to Job in his context.

<sup>4</sup> Is it for your piety that he reproves you,  
and enters into judgement with you?

<sup>5</sup> Is not your wickedness great?  
There is no end to your iniquities.

<sup>6</sup> For you have exacted pledges from your family for no reason,  
and stripped the naked of their clothing.

<sup>7</sup> You have given no water to the weary to drink,  
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.

<sup>8</sup> The powerful possess the land,  
and the favoured live in it.

<sup>9</sup> You have sent widows away empty-handed,  
and the arms of the orphans you have crushed.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore snares are around you,  
and sudden terror overwhelms you,

<sup>11</sup> or darkness so that you cannot see;  
a flood of water covers you.

#### Job 22:4-11

Eliphaz assumes that Job's circumstances reveal significant evil in his life and thus he feels justified in describing the likely ways that Job has sinned.

Is it for your piety that he reproves you? Eliphaz pressed the point home to Job. Surely, the catastrophe that came upon Job, which Eliphaz lightly called correction, did not come because Job feared God; it came because Job's wickedness was great and there is no end to Job's iniquities.

What Eliphaz did not, and seemingly could not consider, was that Job's crisis had nothing to do with correction; it had nothing to do with the Almighty entering into judgement with Job. Because he could not see the heavenly drama that took place in Job Chapters 1 and 2, Eliphaz simply could not conceive of other reasons.

For you have exacted pledges from your family for no reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Eliphaz's first accusation evokes the law that a person should not take someone else's life necessities to secure a debt – such as a cloak: *<<If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down>>* (Exodus 22:26), and: *<<You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this>>* (Deuteronomy 24:17-18), or a mill or millstone used to grind grain for food: *<<No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for that would be taking a life in pledge>>* (Deuteronomy 24:6).

This begins a remarkable list of groundless accusations against Job. He accused Job mainly of greed and cruelty for the sake of riches. None of this was true but Eliphaz assumed it was because Job was once rich and was now beset by such tragedy. The only evidence he could offer was Job's condition and he could not think of another possible explanation for Job's crisis.

In his description of Job's presumed mistreatment of widows and the orphans, Eliphaz speaks in terms similar to the warnings in the law against such practices: *<<You shall not abuse any widow or orphan>>* (Exodus 22:22), and to prophetic oracles of judgement: *<<Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow>>* (Isaiah 1:16-17), *<<Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place>>* (Jeremiah 22:3), and: *<<Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the alien residing within you suffers extortion; the orphan and the widow are wronged in you>>* (Ezekiel 22:7).

Therefore snares are around you. Eliphaz again stated this simple formula that dominated the analysis of Job's friends.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Is not God high in the heavens?  
See the highest stars, how lofty they are!  
<sup>13</sup> Therefore you say, “What does God know?  
Can he judge through the deep darkness?  
<sup>14</sup> Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see,  
and he walks on the dome of heaven.”  
<sup>15</sup> Will you keep to the old way  
that the wicked have trod?  
<sup>16</sup> They were snatched away before their time;  
their foundation was washed away by a flood.  
<sup>17</sup> They said to God, “Leave us alone”,  
and “What can the Almighty do to us?”  
<sup>18</sup> Yet he filled their houses with good things —  
but the plans of the wicked are repugnant to me.  
<sup>19</sup> The righteous see it and are glad;  
the innocent laugh them to scorn,  
<sup>20</sup> saying, “Surely our adversaries are cut off,  
and what they left, the fire has consumed.”

#### Job 22:12-20

Is not God high in the heavens? Here, Eliphaz instructed Job in the basics of theology. He thought that because Job would not admit his error he must be fundamentally wrong in his understanding of God. So he begins with the basic idea of the might, majesty, and sovereignty of God.

Therefore you say, “What does God know? Can he judge through the deep darkness? Thick clouds enwrap him, so that he does not see, and he walks on the dome of heaven.” In response to Job’s continued insistence that the wicked prosper on earth and that his circumstances are not the consequences of sin, Eliphaz asserts that Job is guilty of implying that God is so high that he is unable to ‘know’ or judge life on earth. A question similar to the one that Eliphaz puts in Job’s mouth here, i.e. “What does God know?” is used of the wicked in Psalm 73:11 but it comes amid a lament over their prosperity and safety that is itself

similar to Job's complaint; refer to Psalm 73:1-17. Eliphaz wrongly equates Job's attitude toward God with that of the wicked.

**Will you keep to the old way that the wicked have trod?** Eliphaz warned Job not to harden his heart and mind as those did who were swept away by a flood. This is possibly an obscure reference to the flood in Noah's time and Eliphaz warned Job to not follow in the wickedness of those antediluvian people.

**The apostle gives a perspective on the judgements of God:** <<*For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgement; and if he did not spare the ancient world, even though he saved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world of the ungodly; and if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction and made them an example of what is coming to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the lawless (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by their lawless deeds that he saw and heard), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement – especially those who indulge their flesh in depraved lust, and who despise authority*>> (2 Peter 2:4-10a). **This salvation was the hope of Job.**

In vv.1-18 Eliphaz essentially quotes some of Job's words from Job 21:14-16. However, where Job was arguing that the wicked prosper in spite of open rebellion, Eliphaz is asserting that their prosperity and rebellion are momentary and that the wicked are **snatched away before their time**. Thus, when Job said <<*The plans of the wicked are repugnant to me*>> (Job 21:16b) in order to distance himself from the rebellion and practices of which his friends accused him, Eliphaz uses the same words to cast Job's position on these matters as itself **the plans of the wicked**.

**The righteous see it and are glad.** In contrast to the previously mentioned wicked men the righteous are happy for the judgements of God. This was another way for Eliphaz to say that Job was wicked and not righteous because he did not rejoice in the judgements of God.

<sup>21</sup> 'Agree with God, and be at peace;

in this way good will come to you.

<sup>22</sup> Receive instruction from his mouth,

and lay up his words in your heart.

<sup>23</sup> If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored,

if you remove unrighteousness from your tents,  
<sup>24</sup> if you treat gold like dust,  
and gold of Ophir like the stones of the torrent-bed,  
<sup>25</sup> and if the Almighty is your gold  
and your precious silver,  
<sup>26</sup> then you will delight in the Almighty,  
and lift up your face to God.  
<sup>27</sup> You will pray to him, and he will hear you,  
and you will pay your vows.  
<sup>28</sup> You will decide on a matter, and it will be established for you,  
and light will shine on your ways.  
<sup>29</sup> When others are humiliated, you say it is pride;  
for he saves the humble.  
<sup>30</sup> He will deliver even those who are guilty;  
they will escape because of the cleanness of your hands.'

### Job 22:21-30

Implicit in the plea for Job to agree with God is Eliphaz's presumption that his interpretation of Job's circumstances is equivalent to God's. In particular, it seems Eliphaz thinks his argument in vv.17-18 should be a compelling enough reason for Job to relent and finally agree that his suffering is rooted in his wickedness.

Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you. This was great advice for Job, assuming that the problem was sin in Job's life. Yet it is known on the basis of Job Chapters 1-2 that this assumption was wrong and therefore the advice was wrong.

These words introduce a most exquisite picture of the blessings that fall upon a person when they repent and return to God. They do not fit the case of Job, to whom they were addressed, because he had not left God; and they sound strange coming from the mouth of Eliphaz. Still they are full of sublime truth.

Then you will delight in the Almighty. Eliphaz assumed much because Job was agonising with God instead of finding delight in him. Job's agony with God was a real, though temporary phenomenon.

And lift up your face to God. In a sermon titled *Delight in the Almighty*, Charles Spurgeon explained what this means:

- It means to have joy in God. “When a man hangs his head down he is unhappy: it is the attitude of misery; but oh, when our thoughts of God are changed, and our relationship to God is different, we lift up our faces and sun our countenances in the light of God’s favour.”
- It means to have guilt put away. “Guilt makes a man hang his head. Conscience doth make cowards of us all; but oh, my brothers, when the atoning sacrifice has come with all its power to us, when we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and we are clean every whit, then we lift up our face unto God.”
- It means to be free from fear. “Fear covers her face, and would fain hide herself altogether, even though to accomplish concealment the rocks must fall upon her.”
- It means to have expectation. “Oh, to lift one’s face toward God, looking for deliverance, safety, and rest, and expecting both grace and glory from his right hand!”

Light will shine on your ways; for he saves the humble. For Eliphaz and his friends, the equation was rather simple. All Job needed to do was to confess the deep and great sins that had brought this calamity on to his life and then receive God’s restoration.

He will deliver even those who are guilty; they will escape because of the cleanness of your hands. Verse 30 is another instance of unintended irony in the words of the friends. Eliphaz is suggesting that Job’s repentance would lead to his being able to intercede and bring deliverance even for one who is not innocent. What Eliphaz does not know is that he stands in need of the very deliverance he describes and that it will in fact come through Job’s intercession on his behalf: <<*After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: ‘My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.’ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them; and the Lord accepted Job’s prayer*>> (Job 42:7-9).