

Job's Controversy with His Three Friends (chapters 3-31)

Bildad Takes His Turn (18:1-21)

Homer Hailey wrote that Bildad was “incensed at Job” (163). “Bildad berated” Job (*Bible Knowledge*). He assessed Job’s situation and declared that it was simply the result of the hidden snares of wickedness. In other words, “his hardships were the results of his sins” (Jackson 49).

The ultimate sequence of the series of sufferings through which Job went and the final episode for Job was predictably “the king of terrors” (Job 18:14). “Here death is called the king of terrors, but *Christ came to remedy that problem!*” (Jackson 50).

For the ancients, one thing was even worse than death—“His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street” (Job 18:17). Bildad goaded Job in all of his misery by calling to Job’s memory that his children were dead and that he would have no one after him to carry on the family name. “Among the worst things that could happen to an ancient Semite (Hebrew especially) was having no descendants. ... This was the equivalent to liquidation of the person” (Hailey 167). “Not the evil-doer’s family alone is rooted out, but also his memory” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Everything that Bildad, as well as the two other friends, had expounded to Job was the product of erroneous theology—a “conclusion based on the assumption that all suffering is punishment for wrong doing...” (Hailey 168). Contrary to what the “friends” believed, Job was not a prime example of what happens to wicked people, but instead, Job is the primary specimen by which the sufferers in all ages dare have any hope (cf. *Keil & Delitzsch*).

Job Answers (19:1-29)

“In this chapter Job’s spirit sinks to a level that is probably the lowest in the entire book” (Hailey 169). Using the figure of speech “ten times,” Job declared that his supposed friends had completely and thoroughly thrashed him with words, and still they would not stop.

Our words either hurt others or heal them; we either add to their burdens or help them bear their bur-dens with courage. Job’s friends crushed him with their words; they made him feel worthless and helpless in the face of all his suffering. How sensitive we should be to the needs and struggles of others! Even if people do need rebuke, we should do it in love; and our words should hearten them and not weaken them” (*Bible Exposition*).

In all of their words against him, they were only words, since they could not prove their accusations against him. In verse 7, Job continued to affirm his innocence and that he had been wrongly treated by the false comforters and also wrongly tormented by God. “Both Bildad and Job believed that Job’s hardships were from God, but here is the difference. The former declared that it was due to Job’s sinfulness, while the latter contended it was the result of God’s injustice. *Both were absolutely wrong!*” (Jackson 51).

Job’s hurt was magnified additionally in that his wife, siblings, young people, friends and even his servants ignored him. He observed that he was no more than skin and bones, or aptly

Job looked like *death warmed over*; it couldn't be long until death overtook him. In verse 21, the patriarch desperately begged for pity, but none was forthcoming from any source.

Next, no less confident of his innocence, Job desired that his case be penned in a book, or even more indelibly recorded with lead in stone. He thought that sometime after his demise, posthumously he would be exonerated. Job mentioned a redeemer who he said would come to the earth at a later time. Just what Job may have known regarding what we today ascribe to the Christ it is difficult to know, or he may have referred instead to a kinsman whose responsibility was to clear his name if that were possible.

Death, he sensed was not far away from him, but Job entertained a glimmer of hope that after death he would see God. "...Job clearly expressed his belief in conscious personality beyond death; that he would see God..." (Jackson 52).

Finally, Job closed this rebuttal with a warning to his critical friends. Their demeanor toward him was unjustified, and it warranted divine rebuke in judgment.

Zophar's Retort (20:1-29)

"Zophar professes astonishment that Job required to be instructed on so obvious a point as the Divine law of retribution... With ill-concealed gusto Zophar repeats the popular dogma of the day..." (*Pulpit Commentary*). Not the least bit removed from the faulty philosophy upon which the three friends have been operating in their abuse of Job, Zophar launched out still again against Job. Zophar could not contain himself, and he was reacting to Job's speeches. "The insinuation that the three friends, and not Job, were guilty and stood in danger of God's judgment aroused within him a quick indignant response" (Hailey 179). Zophar retorted that instead of the judgment of God ultimately falling upon the "friends," it was rather Job upon whom God's judgment would come.

It has already been observed that Zophar was the most inveterate of all Job's enemies, for **we really must cease to call them friends**. He sets no bounds to his invective, and outrages every rule of charity. A man of such a bitter spirit must have been, in general, very unhappy. With him Job is, by insinuation, everything that is base, vile, and hypocritical. (Clarke emphasis added)

This wayward spirit can be seen in Christians as well who appear to have been born in the *objective mood and in the kickative case*. While it is appropriate to be *fruit inspectors* (Matthew 7:15-20)—judging righteously (John 7:24), some Christians only see the wrong, sometimes peering so intently upon benign things that they find the wrong there, too. Such is gut-wrenching, physically, emotionally and spiritually hurtful thinking and a way of life. No one is afforded the benefit of the doubt or viewed as innocent until proven guilty, but even every fellow Christian is viewed as evil until proven acceptable. Instead, faithful Christians are called upon in Scripture to 'speak the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15). Otherwise, Christians are miserable and unhappy, and they who are such have a tendency to make everyone else miserable also.

Zophar portrayed Job as evidently wicked and as a hypocrite for appearing to be righteous and for maintaining his innocence. To him, the terrible conditions that had befallen Job were all of the evidence needed to confirm the gross unrighteousness of Job. It was obvious to Zophar Job was merely experiencing the consequence of his sins; some of the physical diseases were the result of the sins of his youth, whereas other tragedies in Job's life were directly the explicit punishments from God. Zophar was "cold, cruel, and heartless. ...Zophar saw God as a God of vengeance who exercises His wrath against the wicked man in a fierce and final manner. There is

not a flicker of love, mercy, or compassion...” in either Zophar’s speech or Zophar’s concept of God. Though men today often minimize the judgmental aspect of God and overemphasize the love of God, Almighty God is both a God of righteous indignation toward the wicked (Psalm 78:49; Romans 2:8; Hebrews 10:27) and a loving God toward the obedient (1 John 4:16).

The speech of Zophar, ch. 20, is his ultimatum, for in the third course of the controversy he takes no part. We have already seen from his first speech, ch. 11, that he is the most impassioned of the friends. His vehemence is now the less excusable, since Job in his previous speech has used the truly spiritual language of importunate entreaty and earnest warning in reply to the friends. The friends would now have done well if they had been silent, and still better if they had recognised in the sufferer the tried and buffeted servant of God, and had withdrawn their charges, which his innermost nature repudiates. But Zophar is not disposed to allow the reproach of the correction which they received to rest upon him; in him we have an illustration of the fact that a man is never more eloquent than when he has to defend his injured honour...

It has been rightly remarked, that in Zophar... described to us one of those hot-heads who pretend to fight for religion that is imperilled, while they are zealous for their own wounded vanity. ...He has nothing new to bring forward in reply to Job; ...For they are completely spent in their one dogma... All that is new in the speech of Zophar, and in those of the friends generally, in this second course of the controversy, is, that they no longer try to lure Job on to penitence by promises, but endeavour to bring him to a right state of mind, or rather to weaken his supposedly-mad assault upon themselves, by presenting to him only the most terrible images. (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Zophar made a lot of noise, essentially, with which he purposed to frighten Job if he could.

“...Zophar does not affix any very distinct meaning to his threats. He is content to utter a series of fierce-sounding but vague menaces, which he knows that Job will regard as launched against himself, and does not care whether they are taken metaphorically or literally” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Job’s Reply to Zophar (21:1-34)

Job promptly replies, during which he both indicts his counselors as well as God. From his vantage, God is as likely to punish the righteous and ignore rebuff of the wicked as He is to reward the godly and punish the ungodly. Job sees God as indiscriminate in His treatment of humanity. Further, Job called his enemy-like friends ‘mockers,’ and he directly charged them as adamantly as before for babbling falsehoods against him. Job continued to defend himself against baseless and hurtful accusations from those who claimed to be his friends. “Look, I know your thoughts, And the schemes with which you would wrong me” (Job 21:27).

Since God sends rain and sunshine on the just and the unjust in his general providence (Matthew 5:45), and because these days God chiefly reserves punishment for the end of time (2 Peter 3:7), present prosperity or the lack thereof cannot be viewed as an adequate determination of God’s approval or disapproval of someone. “Job contends that there is no *generalization* that can be made regarding the temporal punishment of the wicked” (Jackson 55).

For two reasons, the friends' arguments had made no impression on Job. *First*, he was not guilty of the secret sins for which the friends supposed that God was persecuting Job. *Second*, the arguments of the friends clearly were false, because wicked people often do prosper. Therefore, God does not always punish the wicked with adversity. Certainly, had any of the "friends" suffered setbacks even in a small way comparable to what Job had endured, he, too, would have quickly acknowledged the fallacious proposition that adversity would never come to the righteous.

The Third Cycle of Speeches (22:1-31:40)

In the first cycle of speeches the friends made their plea to Job on the basis of the general view of God – His goodness, justice, and omnipotent insight in all things. In the second cycle they emphasized the characteristics of the wicked and the retribution that befalls them. Both approaches had failed to melt what they considered to be Job's obstinate persistence. They had exhausted these two lines of reasoning; Job brushed them aside, continuing to defend his innocence and charging God with injustice. In the third cycle Eliphaz made a direct attack, charging Job with specific sins. Bildad added nothing new to their arguments, and Zophar did not respond at all. (Hailey 197)

"Zophar, in a concession of defeat, fails to come forward" (Jackson 57).

Eliphaz Speaks (22:1-30)

Eliphaz began with generalization that Job's wickedness was great, fueled by an infinite number of sins (verse 5). Adam Clarke noted of Eliphaz's complaint toward Job, "Thy sins are not only many, but they are great; and of thy continuance in them there is no end." Next, Eliphaz accused Job of several specific sins, which if he would repent of them, then according to Eliphaz, God would restore great prosperity (i.e., "gold as dust," "plenty of silver") to Job. Eliphaz said that Job was guilty of the type of sins to which Jesus referred when talking about the Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. While the warning was valid generally, it was misplaced in application to Job.

...he made unfounded charges on the assumed premise that all suffering was punishment for wrong doing. Job was a great sufferer, therefore a great sinner. It appears that he [Eliphaz] fell into the fault of many: if one fails to meet the facts of truth and argument, leave these and attack the person, manufacture charges. (Hailey 197)

"Eliphaz offered no evidence to prove his charges; only a conclusion that was based on his theology" (Hailey 201). Even the baseless charges by esteemed men today can severely mar the reputation of otherwise faithful children of God; we need to be careful.

The line of reasoning that Eliphaz employed was thus. "If it is a self-contradiction that God should chastise a man because he fears Him, there must be sin on the side of Job; and indeed, since the nature of the sin is to be measured according to the nature of the suffering, great and measureless sin" (*Keil & Delitzsch*). The premise, though, is false because not all suffering comes forth from God (e.g., consequence of the sins of others). Therefore, the conclusions likewise were unreliable.

Eliphaz categorized the sins of Job to be comparable to the sins characteristic of sinners who perished in the flood of Noah's day (verses 15-16). This gives us some sense of the relative

period of the writing of the Book of Job—during patriarchy after the universal flood. One also notes the degree of depravity with which Eliphaz charged Job, so hideous that God once destroyed nearly every human for that degree of sinfulness.

Once more, we see the material side only with no consideration of the spiritual arena in the friends' theology of reward and punishment respecting sin. "Eliphaz still seems to be thinking about material profit and loss" (Hailey 198). Any concept of God and God-authored religion that does not entertain the spiritual relationship between God and man is defective in this regard, too.

As observed before herein, the manner in which even the child of God with the best of intentions approaches an erring soul matters greatly respecting the likelihood of persuading a sinner to repent. "But such vicious accusations would hardly be likely to bring *anyone* to repentance" (Jackson 58).

"...[I]n Eliphaz's mind Job was at war with God" (Hailey 204). However, instead, Eliphaz would have done better to realize that "[h]uman traditions are not to be confused with the word of God" (Hailey 204). There are a few areas in which 'human traditions' even today have been elevated incorrectly to doctrinal considerations (e.g., number of communion cups, order of worship activities, whether the preacher has facial hair, jacket and tie to serve the Lord's Supper, etc.).

Job's Response (23:1-24:25)

Job "derived neither conviction nor consolation from his friends" (Clarke). He responded, ignoring what Eliphaz had to say, by lamenting his inability to search out God to argue his case before Him. Still, Job affirmed his loyalty to God and that he had not violated the known will of God. Once more, Job decried the inequity he perceived on God's part for not punishing the wicked, and yet, afflicting him. "At this point Job does not reply to the specific indictments that have been leveled against him; rather, he is preoccupied with the apparent injustice of God's providential workings..." (Jackson 58-59). "Unable to convince men of his just cause, Job yearned for the opportunity to present his case before God in an impartial trial" (Hailey 207). Instead of arguing with his friends, or compromising his integrity by giving in to Eliphaz's appeal, Job ignores them completely and speaks to and about the Lord. Job has already made it clear that his dispute was not with men but with God, and he emphasizes this fact in his speech. (*Bible Exposition*)

"Unlike the friends who spoke from tradition, Job spoke from observation – facts of life" (Hailey 220). Job enumerated the sins of wicked men that were commonly observable in his day around him, but he objected to (1) being classified as one of them, and (2) God not reproving them in this life, but permitting them to go on with an apparent immunity from divine chastisement. Again, he pondered as do we sometimes: "Why do bad things happen to good people, and why do good things happen to bad people?" The world thinks that Christians are dopes when we obey laws and do not run to the same excess with them (1 Peter 4:4).

Poor Job had no way of knowing what had transpired behind the scenes, hidden from mere mortals, which resulted in his suffering. Yet, Job was confident that at least when he managed to have his audience with God that he would understand. Job trusted in God despite not knowing the "*why*" for the great tragedies that he had experienced and the ongoing suffering that he endured. Doesn't that remind us of the hymn, which in part says,

 Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder
 Why it should be thus all the day long;

While there are others living about us,
Never molested, though in the wrong.

Refrain:

Farther along we'll know more about it,
Farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine,
We'll understand it all by and by.

“Since Job reached the conclusion that God was his witness in heaven (16:19), and his redeemer whom he would find on his side (19:25-27), he had faced his problems from a different perspective” (Hailey 208). We who are faithful Christians, too, ought to meet the problems and adversities of life differently than do non-Christians and ungodly people. “Although Eliphaz charged him with denying the omniscience of God (22:1-14), Job reaffirmed his confidence that God know the direction of his life in all its ways” (Hailey 209). God knows the “secrets” of a man, who is unrighteous and who is righteousness (Psalm 44:21; Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Bildad's Third and Final Speech (25:1-6)

Bildad attempted to disarm Job's stated desire to appear before God for acquittal by belittling humanity as too inferior to stand in the presence of God. “Bildad sought to humiliate Job, to awaken him to his own unworthiness” (*Bible Knowledge*). Of course, his indictment toward Job as severely cut back on himself, his friends and every other mortal, too. Anything that proves too much doesn't prove anything at all. Other than the one point Bildad uttered, he seemed to be at a loss for words finally.

Lest anyone attempt to capitalize on Bildad's statement as the basis for claiming original sin or hereditary depravity, be it remembered that the speeches of Job's supposed friends are not inspired. Further, those discourses are riddled with errors. In addition, children are clearly born without sin (Ezekiel 18:20) and little children do not have sin attributed to them yet, either (Matthew 18:3; 19:14).

When Bildad asked “How can a man be justified with God?” he supposed that he had posed a rhetorical question, to which the implied answer would be, “One cannot be justified before God.” In truth, the Old Testament typified and shadowed the reality of justification before God through a perfect, sacrificed Savior – Jesus Christ. Through the redeeming sacrifice of the sinless Son of God, which we imitate in baptism (Romans 6:3-5), otherwise obeying our Lord (Hebrews 5:8-9), and in conjunction with the grace (Ephesians 2:8) and mercy (Titus 3:5) of God, we can be saved from our sins. Consequently, we can boldly appear before our God (Hebrews 4:16).

Thus endeth Bildad the Shuhite, who endeavoured to speak on a subject which he did not understand; and, having gotten on bad ground, was soon confounded in his own mind, spoke incoherently, argued inconclusively, and came abruptly and suddenly to an end. Thus, his three friends being confounded, Job was left to pursue his own way; they trouble him no more; and he proceeds in triumph to the end of the 31st chapter. (Clarke)

What can we learn from the failed efforts of the three friends to counsel Job?

A review of the speeches of Job's associates shows that they were poor counselors. They failed in several ways: (1) They did not express any sympathy for Job in their speeches. (2) They did not pray for him. (3) They seemingly

ignored Job's expressions of emotional and physical agony. (4) They talked too much and did not seem to listen adequately to their advice. (5) They became defensive and argumentative. (6) They belittled rather than encouraged Job. (7) They assumed they knew the cause of Job's problems. (8) They stubbornly persisted in their views of Job's problem, even when their ideas contradicted the facts. (9) They suggested an inappropriate solution to his problem. (10) They blamed Job and condemned him for expressing grief and frustration. Counselors today do well to be sure they do not fail in similar ways. (*Bible Knowledge*)

Job Speaks (26:1-31:40)

In **Chapter 26**, Job reduced the words of Bildad to useless chatter, having accomplished nothing and lacking any quality of counsel. In **Chapter 27**, Job accused God of having afflicted him, and yet, Job avowed not to depart from Him, but instead maintain his righteousness as long as he lived. Unlike the wicked who could never appeal to God for rescue, Job was determined to remain faithful to the Almighty. "I stand firmly on this ground; I have endeavoured to live an upright life, and my afflictions are not the consequence of my sins" (Clarke).

In **Chapter 28**, Job decided to side with the wisdom that only God knows. "The wisdom whereof Job speaks is that wisdom by which God rules His world; He alone knows its secrets and laws, both of the physical or material world (vv. 23-27) and the spiritual or moral world (v. 28). He alone knows the place where wisdom is found. Only God comprehends..." (Hailey 246). Incidentally, Job evidenced abundant knowledge of mining, smelting and metal working, which men have known from the earliest history of humanity (Hailey 242). The contrast between human wisdom and divine wisdom was also the subject of the apostle Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 1:18-21.

In **Chapter 29**, Job remembered the former days of his comfortable living, his esteem among men and his righteous works; he longed for those days. "...Job recalls 'the good ole days'" (Jackson 63) or was struck with "nostalgia" (Hailey 250).

Chapter 30 finds Job lamenting that those pleasant former times were replaced with derision directed toward him by the "children of fools" and the "children of base men"; he had become a "byword" thrust out of the mouths of the lowest specimens of humanity. Even the "rabble... stood aloof from him as if he were beneath them" (Hailey 257). Young people toyed with and abused poor Job. Aside from rudeness and poor upbringing, for youth to mistreat an older person in antiquity or even in Asia today is a sever breach of cultural conduct.

The patriarch, then, turned to noting his wretched physical condition. However, the greatest injury Job felt was his perception that he had been abandoned by God; our Lord on the cross sensed the agony of being without fellowship with the Father (Matthew 27:46), and the wicked will be punished, in part, without the presence of God eternally (2 Thessalonians 1:9). "He has been mistreated by both man and God" (Jackson 63), he thought. In **Chapter 31**, Job listed his godly characteristics and actions, whereupon he was confident that given the opportunity in a trial before God that he would be vindicated as righteous.

"In remarkable contrast to Bildad's brief reply, Job's response is a grand climax (chapters 26-31) to all three of his critical companions..." (Jackson 61). "Job's friends had tried to persuade him to confess to sins of which he was not guilty, but this he would not do for such would be hypocrisy and wickedness, and God will deal with the wicked!" (Jackson 62). Still, "Job believed that he was the victim of a miscarriage of justice..." (Hailey 239). "Though Job has wondered why the innocent suffer, and why wicked men go on prospering at length, he has

nonetheless believed that the godless would eventually get their just deserts” (Jackson 62). “Unlike Adam who sought to hide himself and his shame, Job in his innocence would come near to God in the dignity of a prince” (Hailey 273).

Elihu’s Presentation (chapters 32-37)

Jehovah Speaks to Job (chapters 38-41)

Job Is Blessed (chapter 42)

Special Studies

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