

So, how are we to read these chapters in Job? It's helpful to focus on three questions:

- What is the speaker's central message?
- How is this message wrong, incomplete, or misapplied?
- What is the speaker's advice to Job?

This is rich and fascinating territory. It will expose flaws in our own thinking about pain and suffering. And it will shine new light on God's working in our world and our lives.

DAY 1

- 1) Read Job chapter 4 without stopping, as if listening to a speech. You may want to read it aloud. This is the first half of Eliphaz's first speech. Consider the passage from an overall perspective, looking for main ideas behind the ornate words.
- 2) What is Eliphaz's attitude toward Job as he begins his speech (4:1-6)? Note the shift in emotion from verses 3-4 to verses 5-6.
- 3) What is the central message(s) of Eliphaz's speech? Pay close attention to 4:7-8.
HINT: Look specifically for what the speaker says about God and suffering. Don't make this too hard! There are no right or wrong answers. Simply record what stands out most in your mind.
- 4) How is Eliphaz's message wrong, incomplete, or misapplied?
HINT: Use your personal knowledge of God and suffering to answer this question. Note real life examples or other passages in scripture that contradict the speaker.
- 5) What does Eliphaz claim to be the sources of his wisdom?
4:8—
4:12-13—
4:15-16—
- 6) Romans 3:10-12 tells us,
None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside: together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

Answer the following with these verses in mind.

What true observation does Eliphaz make in 4:17?

How does he misapply this truth to Job's circumstance (look ahead to 5:17)?

Selah

Proverbs 15:23 says, "How delightful is a timely word!" Think of an instance when you were facing difficulties. What types of things did people say to you? What statements were comforting? What comments made you feel even more burdened or isolated?

What kind of comforter are you? When talking to someone who is hurting, do you tend to say things you later regret? Or are you so afraid of saying the wrong thing, you fail to offer any word of comfort at all? Does someone you know need encouragement? Allow the Lord to use you to speak words of comfort and strength to them today.

DAY 2

- 1) Read Job chapter 5. This is the second half of Eliphaz's speech.
- 2) Focus on 5:6. In these poetic words, Eliphaz makes a key observation about affliction: *Bad stuff doesn't come out of nowhere.* In other words, there has to be a reason why. Do you agree with this observation? Why or why not?
- 3) From what you have read in Job 4-5, where do you think Eliphaz believes trouble comes from and why?
- 4) Read John 9:1-3. What does this passage teach us about the causes of affliction?
- 5) What does Eliphaz advise Job to do? (5:8, 17)
- 6) What does Eliphaz say will happen if Job follows his advice? (5:18-26)

Selah

Why is this happening to me? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Have you ever peered into every corner and crevice in your heart desperately searching for that "sin" that must be the cause behind all your heartache—believing that if you only

confess and make things right with God He will remove His hand of pain and suffering? This is the same wrong thinking that clouded the mind of Eliphaz.

Read I Peter 4:12-13. Meditate on these words and the life of Job, allowing God's truth to uproot any wrong thinking in your own mind and to bring solace to your soul.

DAY 3

- 1) Read Job's response to Eliphaz in Job chapter 6.
Hint: A wadi (6:15) is a stream in the wilderness which is a raging torrent after a storm or when the snow melts but vanishes in the heat when water is needed most.
- 2) Focus on 6:2-3, 26. How does Job describe and explain the things he has been saying? What insight does this give about how to respond to the things people say in a crisis?

- 3) How does Job describe the way God has treated him?

How does Job describe the way his friends have treated him?

- 4) What is Job's "prayer request" (vs. 8-9)
- 5) What is Job's one source of joy in all his pain? (vs. 10)
- 6) What should true friends offer to one who is in despair? Why? (vs. 14)

Selah

"For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; so that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty" (6:14). Think of a time when someone's kindness encouraged you to stay near to God during a difficult time. Be prepared to share your experience with your small group.

DAY 4

- 1) Read chapter 7 as Job continues his speech. Notice he is no longer addressing his friends; some of his words are addressed to God while others are more of a soliloquy.
- 2) List the physical, mental and emotional effects of Job's suffering described in this chapter (vs. 4-7, 13-16).

Do you think Job believes he is going to recover? Why or why not?

- 3) Read Psalm 8:4-9 and Psalm 139:16-18. Compare with Job 7:17-20. Contrast how the psalmist and Job each view the watchful care of God.

- 4) Focus on Job 7:20-21. How certain do you think Job is about his innocence at this point? If he isn't sinless, what does he think God should do?

Selah

You are on the mind of God. Doesn't that send chills through you? The Bible says that God's thoughts toward you outnumber the grains of sand (Ps. 139:18). How often is God on your mind? How many times do you think of Him throughout the day? Commit to keeping God on your mind moment by moment. He deserves our full attention.

DAY 5

Read through the EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION section that follows.

EXPOSITION & EXPLANATION

Eliphaz's Opening Speech (chps 4-5)

Maybe you read these chapters and thought, "No one I know talks like this. How did we get this detailed account of such elaborate speeches? Surely nobody caught this on video."

Let's consider the setting first. Job is sitting in ashes outside the city gates. Three wealthy sheiks have come from afar to be with him, most likely traveling in elaborate caravans. It would be like a fleet of limousines and several million-dollar motor homes pulling into your neighborhood all at the same time. Undoubtedly this drew a great crowd of onlookers.

As Eliphaz clears his throat to begin his speech, it is reasonable to assume an audience is listening. Such debates of ideas and lectures on wisdom were customary at the city gates in biblical times. It was a form of instruction and entertainment for the entire population. The cycle of speeches about God and justice, about suffering and blessing, captured the

attention of the people. Combined with the startling events that happened before and after his affliction, the story of Job became one that people would tell and retell, again and again, for generations until it became an oral tradition.

At the time appointed by God, Job's story was written down truthfully in all its beauty by the inspiration of God, including the window into heaven in the first two chapters—information Job never knew. We know exactly what God wants us to know about Job and these conversations, and it is communicated in the exact form He wants us to read it.

Insult to Iniury (4:1-6)

As if Job isn't suffering enough, Eliphaz launches into the keynote address in a series of speeches from the "friends" or counselors. If we hadn't read the first two chapters of Job, we might have agreed with much of what Eliphaz has to say. His words sound so righteous, especially when compared to Job's raw venting in chapter 3. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* warns, "...we must keep in mind that the overall purpose of the book includes the concept that the counselors were basically wrong even though their words were often right... It is not what Eliphaz knew that is wrong; it is what he was ignorant of—God's hidden purpose—that made all his beautiful poetry and grand truth only a snare to Job." Eliphaz lacked the intimate relationship with God needed to correctly apply truth to real life.

Eliphaz begins by complimenting Job on his wise counsel to others in times of weakness. He quickly turns the tables asserting it is now Job who is in need of instruction, challenging him to follow his own advice. *Aren't you the one always telling everybody it's all about God?*

Main Message of Eliphaz (4:7)

This verse encapsulates the main message of Eliphaz: "Who ever perished being innocent?" Translation: *Look closely Job, you're getting what you deserve. If you were as godly as you claim to be this wouldn't be happening to you.* This is the underlying message of all three counselors.

At this point you're probably thinking, *Why doesn't this guy's brain explode? Come on, Eliphaz, you can't think of anyone innocent who ever perished?* I sure can. What about the victims of 9/11? What about the twenty first graders killed in the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary school? What about martyrs like Jim Elliott and Nate Saint? What about the Lamb of God (Isaiah 53:5)?

The New Testament warns that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). 1 Peter 4:12-13 tells us, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

Perhaps the most precious and hopeful message of the book of Job is that affliction isn't just about sin and judgment. It is also about God's glory and our strengthening.

Source of Wisdom (4:8-16)

Eliphaz clearly bases his knowledge about God on personal experience.

- "According to what I have seen" (4:8)
- "A word was brought to me...amid...visions of the night" (4:12-13)
- "A spirit passed by my face...then I heard a voice" (4:15-16)
- "We have investigated it, and so it is" (5:27)

Among his personal experiences, Eliphaz claims to have an encounter with the supernatural through a terrifying dream. Isn't it interesting that Job's counselor is having nightmares? Most of us have had the experience of being gripped by fear and uneasiness when someone close to us suffers a horrible blow. It haunts us at night. It's our first thought in the morning. It leaves us feeling vulnerable. We can't help imagining, *what if that was happening to me?*

Job points out this reality to his friends, "You see a terror and are afraid" (6:28). This may be one reason people say such inappropriate things to those facing tragedy. We feel a desperate need to explain, dismiss, or fix their suffering so we don't feel so frightened. As Swindoll puts it, "Sufferers attract fixers the way road kill attracts vultures."

Right Words – Wrong Thinking (4:17-5:27)

The message Eliphaz receives through his supernatural encounter is recorded in 4:17. "Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?" This is undoubtedly a true statement. Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Eliphaz makes the mistake of misapplying this truth and ending up with the wrong conclusion. He assumes that because no one is perfect, Job's suffering must be because of his sin. That's a pretty big leap. We know from Job 1-2 that in truth Job's suffering is not because of his sin but because of his blameless and upright walk with God.

In much the same way, Eliphaz's description of the benefits of God's discipline is filled with truth (5:17-26). The big problem is: Job wasn't being disciplined! There's little doubt Eliphaz's sermon left Job feeling more accused than encouraged.

Job's Response (chps 6-7)

Job cries out against the stinging words of Eliphaz. "Oh that my grief were actually weighed" (6:2). Job pleads to his counselors—*if you could only understand my pain. I have ten dead children. I've lost everything. My suffering is more than you can ever imagine. Just look at me!*

A Word About Words

Job cites his intense grief and suffering as the reason for his rash words (6:3, 26), referring to his lament in chapter 3. In the depths of despair when people come to the end of their rope, words come out that they later regret. In times such as these, we need

to be gracious with one another, refusing to judge every word. We need to offer compassion not correction.

It is of crucial importance that in spite of this intense suffering, Job still refuses to curse God. "I have not denied the words of the Holy One" (6:10). This is Job's consolation, his source of joy in unsparing pain. What an amazing testimony! Beneath the rubble of his shattered life and broken body, we get a clear glimpse of Job's abiding relationship with his Creator.

Despite the crushing criticism, Job makes it clear he has no intention of holding back his words. "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11). J. William Worden, a professor at the Rosemead School of Psychology, explains that the first task of grieving is to accept what has happened. We do that by putting our pain into words. "Talking about a loss is a way to make it real. Part of how you make meaning is by telling others about the loss. It brings the reality home." Job needed to talk it out, and he needed friends to listen with understanding and concern.

That's What Friends Are For (6:14-23)

Job describes the role of a true friend in times of suffering. "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend; so that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty" (6:14). The word kindness (Hebrew *hesed*) means intense devotion. The faithful love of a true friend can help us cling to our faith instead of reject it in times of hardship. This is all Job ever wanted from his friends. He never asked for anything tangible—no ransom or rescue effort (6:22-23).

Galatians 6:2 tells us to "bear one another's burdens"—share our problems and trials—"and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." It takes intense devotion to share in the suffering of a friend, to listen to their heart cries (perhaps again and again), to sit beside them in the hospital, to hold their hand when they feel alone, to wait with tender longsuffering for the Lord to restore their joy. This is the kindness we all long for in times of sorrow.

God is Watching Us (7:17-20)

Job is painfully aware of God's presence, but it brings him no comfort. He sees God's interest as a negative—as if God's sole purpose is to find fault in him so He can torment him.

What is man that You magnify him, and that You are concerned about him, that You examine him every morning and try him every moment? Will you never turn Your gaze away from me?... What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as your target?...
—Job 7:17-20

Compare Job's words to those of the psalmist.

What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with

glory and majesty! You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.
—Psalm 8:4-6

Same truth. Different application. What makes the difference is our perspective. We face the challenge to keep the right focus every time trials come our way. Consider a few examples.

<u>Truth</u>	<u>Wrong Perspective / Right Perspective</u>
God loves me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Then why is He letting this happen? • Then He will never leave me to face this alone.
God is all powerful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Then why doesn't He stop the pain • Then He can enable me to endure the pain.
God is all knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Then why didn't He prevent this? • Then He knows how to work even this for His glory and my good.

My point isn't to criticize poor Job; his response is totally understandable at this moment. But it is important in times when our thinking is clear—when we are standing on solid ground—to learn the lessons we will need when the going gets rough. We need to hold on to the truth and keep our trials in the right perspective.

I wonder how Job might have responded if Eliphaz had wrapped an arm around his shoulders and said, *You're right, Job. God is watching. He sees your suffering. He is with you even now no matter how much you hurt. I don't know why this is happening, but I'm here with you, too.*

When we love and listen much, we often have the privilege of helping a friend to see their struggles from a new perspective, renewing hope and strength at the moment they are needed most.

"What Did I Do To Deserve This?" (7:20-21)

Job concludes his speech by crying out at what he perceives to be God's injustice. "Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men?... Why then do you not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?" (7:20-21).

Job isn't claiming total sinlessness here; we actually hear him questioning himself. *God, what have I done wrong? What did I do to deserve this?*

Job holds the following to be true:

- Job is confident he has feared God and lived righteously.
- Job is unaware of any sin he may have committed that would be a great enough offense to deserve this horrible affliction.
- If he has sinned, Job believes God should pardon and forgive him knowing he is a faithful follower of the Lord.

The greatest torment Job is facing isn't a physical one, or an emotional one, but a spiritual one. He can't get what he knows about God and himself to match up with what is happening in his life. As a result, he begins to feel that God is being unjust. This is the very error Job eventually repents of in dust and ashes (42:6). We will look at these themes more in the weeks ahead.