***Job: A Study in Suffering…And Faith***

Lesson Three: Eliphaz’s First Speech and Job’s Reply

(Job 4:1-7:21)

***Objective(s):***

1. Be able to summarize the arguments of Eliphaz and Job’s reply.

2. Be able to characterize Job’s comments to God (chapter 7).

1. **Eliphaz affirmed that suffering is because of sin (4:1-21).**
   1. He began by reminding Job of his (Job’s) counsel to others who were troubled or suffering and encouraged him to heed his own advice. It may be that Eliphaz was being sarcastic in verses 5 and 6 (vv. 1-6).
   2. The innocent and upright do not perish (vv. 7-11).
      1. A man reaps as he sows.
      2. Wicked men are likened to a den of lions. Despite their ferocity, they will be consumed by the breath of God.
   3. Eliphaz related a vision he allegedly had (vv. 12-21).
      1. He told of a spirit who appeared to him, causing great fear on his part (vv. 12-16).
      2. Two possibilities exist as to the message of the spirit (v. 15), depending upon the translation of verse 17:
         1. Based on the reading of the KJV and NKJV (“more righteous” and “more pure”), the message would seem to be that “no mortal man could pass judgment upon God in the matter of His administration of justice.”1
         2. Based on the reading of the ESV (“in the right before God,” “pure before his Maker”), the message would then seem to be that suffering because of personal sin is inevitable.2
         3. Both meanings appear to be plausible. The first one (NKJV) seems to be supported by the comments of Eliphaz in 5:1-17. On the other hand, the second view (ESV) has the following considerations to commend it:
            1. Job had not yet questioned God’s fairness in causing him to suffer.
            2. The second meaning seems to fit better with the context of the chapter –suffering is because of personal sin.
            3. Note the similarity of 15:14-16 and 25:4-6.

**Job 15:14–16 (ESV)** **14** What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous? **15** Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight; **16** how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water!

**Job 25:4–6 (ESV)** **4** How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? **5** Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; **6** how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!”

* + 1. The propensity of humans toward error and the fragility of their lives are emphasized (vv. 18-21).

1. **Eliphaz encouraged Job to “seek God” (5:1-27).**
   1. He warned Job of the danger of wrath against God’s ways (vv. 1-7).
      1. Eliphaz related the fortunes of a fool he had observed.
      2. Although no formal application was made at this time, it appears that Eliphaz may have been implying a similarity between Job and this “fool” of whom he spoke.
   2. Eliphaz told Job that he would seek God if he were in Job’s place (vv. 8-16).
      1. In these verses Eliphaz made reference to God’s good providence; He helps the downtrodden and foils those who would do wrong.
      2. This section seems to be little more than an appeal to Job to repent because “crime doesn’t pay.”
   3. Eliphaz concluded his first speech by admonishing Job not to “despise the discipline of the Almighty” (vv. 17-27).
      1. He suggested that God would deliver the one who humbly submits to His correction from all manner of evil (vv. 18-22).
      2. By graciously accepting God’s discipline, he would prosper in every respect (vv. 23-26).
2. **Job responded to Eliphaz’s speech (6:1-30).**
   1. Job recognized that his words (chapter 3) had been rash, but he suggested that such rashness was understandable in view of his great suffering (vv. 1-7).
      1. Job was suggesting in verse 5 that, just as animals make noise when they have a reason, so he has a reason to express his grief.3
      2. The subject of verses 6-7 may be either Job’s sufferings or the words of “comfort” offered by Eliphaz.
   2. Job wished that God would grant him his request – cause him to die. He expressed doubt that he could hold out. His strength was not unfailing (vv. 8-13).
   3. He criticized his friends for accusing him of wrongdoing rather than showing sympathy (vv. 14-23).
      1. He likened them to a wadi. In the rainy season when water is plentiful, it is full; but once the heat begins and travelers seek its water, it has vanished. In similar fashion, when Job needed compassion and sympathy from his friends and expected it, they turned out be brooks that had dried up (vv. 14-21).4
      2. Job complained that he was not asking them for much (vv. 22-23).
   4. Job challenged his friends to point out his sin which was supposedly responsible for his great suffering (vv. 24-30).
      1. He asserted that they had no evidence for their cruel words.
      2. He affirmed that he had not been lying about his innocence nor was he unable to recognize unrighteousness.
3. **Job cried out in despair (7:1-21).**
   1. There is some question as to whether the entire chapter was addressed to God or whether verses 1-10 were spoken for the friends’ benefit and the remainder of the chapter spoken to God.
   2. He described the greatness and hopelessness of his sufferings and anguish (vv. 1-10).5
      1. His life was one of hard servitude with the only pay being months of futility and wearisome nights.
      2. He was unable to sleep and described the torture of his disease.
      3. He recounted the fact that his life was brief as if to say that God should show him mercy in what little time he had left.
   3. Job questioned God as to the reason for the severity of his suffering (vv. 11-21).
      1. He asked why it was necessary for God to constantly harass him with suffering (as it seemed to him).
      2. He requested that God leave him alone.
      3. Job affirmed by rhetorical questions that man is too insignificant to receive such continued attention from God (vv. 17-19).
      4. Jackson paraphrased the thoughts of Job in verses 20-21 very well. He writes:6
         1. *Job challenges God, as he had his friends (6:24), “If I have sinned, what did I do?” (20). He accuses God of treating him like a “mark” [target-NIV] (cf. 6:4). And if he has sinned, why not forgive him and take away this penalty? Then with a sharp jab the patriarch says, “I will lie down in the dust, and thou shall seek me dili­gently, but I shall not be” (21). Essentially, he is saying, “I’ll soon be gone and you won’t have me to kick around anymore.” Job speaks disrespectfully and stupidly, but remember he is talking rashly (6:23), desperately (6:26) and without understanding (42:3).*

**Endnotes:**

1Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 47.

2Gibson, p. 22. Also S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977), pp. 46-7.

3Gibson, p. 30. 4Archer, p. 52. 5Bible Class Notes by Homer Hailey, p. 9.

6Jackson, p. 38.

***Study & Discussion Questions:***

1. Of what did Eliphaz remind Job in 4:3-6?
2. What did Eliphaz believe is the relationship between suffering and sin?
3. What did Eliphaz hope to suggest by the relating of his vision?
4. Explain the meaning of 5:6-7.
5. How did Job describe the “comfort” of his friends?
6. With what challenge did Job present his friends?

**Additional Discussion Questions:**

1. Are there any true statements in Eliphaz’s speech? Any weaknesses? Give evidence for your answer.
2. Compare Psalm 8:3-8 with Job 7:17-19. What do you see?