

Job 15 • The Irony of Who is Really Listening

Introduction

In this second round of arguments, Eliphaz is once again the first to speak as in Job 4-5. He previously concentrated on God's moral perfection and Eliphaz's own personal experience, contending that Job could be restored to good health if he listened to Eliphaz. He will here use accusations, rhetorical questions, and draw parallel reference to the wicked in an attempt to persuade Job of his case, showing that he believes Job to be deceived and corrupted by personal sin. In reality, however, Eliphaz will indict himself of the very accusations he attempts to ascribe to Job. Eliphaz provides one of the most common dilemmas we regularly face in dealing with those who for some reason cannot see the contradiction in their own speech and behavior.

¹Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded,

²"Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge

And fill himself with the east wind?

³Should he argue with useless talk, Or with words which are not profitable?

⁴Indeed, you do away with reverence And hinder meditation before God.

⁵For your guilt teaches your mouth, And you choose the language of the crafty.

⁶Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;

And your own lips testify against you.

Read verses 1-6

Q: How does Eliphaz progressively describe Job's responses to this point?

- (v.2) "...windy knowledge"
- (v.2) "...the east wind"
- (v.3) "...useless talk"
- (v.3) "...words which are not profitable"

Eliphaz begins metaphorically but progressively becomes literal to explain his intent.

Q: Why does Eliphaz specify the EAST wind?

A: In the Middle East this is the hot, uncomfortable wind that comes from the east across the scorching desert.

Point: As a supposed friend, Eliphaz begins from a very unfriendly place, bluntly stating that nothing Job has said is worth listening to.

Q: How does Eliphaz see Job's speech as revealing a greater spiritual problem?

A: In v.4 Eliphaz says Job is not only irreverent toward God but cannot properly communicate with Him either.

Q: Why might Eliphaz's choice of "meditate" be particularly biting to Job in the context of what is being said?

A: Biblically, "meditate" is most often associated with incorporating God's Word into one's prayer life. It is a way of stating that Job's words are not just empty where man is concerned, but God as well.

Point: Eliphaz challenges Job that his speech is not only "useless" and "not profitable", but not fitting to be heard by God in the first place.

Q: What are Eliphaz's specific charges in v.5?

A: Because everything Job says is influenced by the guilt of his sin, Job can't possibly be speaking with the wisdom of God but forming his opinions with the same worldly devices of "the crafty".

Observation: In v.5, the English word translated "guilt" is actually "avon" in Hebrew, which is prolifically translated more than 200 times in the Old Testament as "iniquities". This is related to sin, but specifically describes man's attempt to twist God's Word and ways to suit his own arguments or behavior.

Q: What proof does Eliphaz offer to verify the correctness of his assertions?

A: In v.6 he insists this is not his own opinion but the obvious conclusion of Job's rebuttals.

Application: Eliphaz believes everything is **revealed** by Job's own **words**, both his personal **sin** and his adoption of the world's **ways** to make them sound **godly**.

7"Were you the first man to be born,
Or were you brought forth before the
hills?
8Do you hear the secret counsel of God,
And limit wisdom to yourself?
9What do you know that we do not
know?
What do you understand that we do
not?
10Both the gray-haired and the aged are
among us,
Older than your father.
11Are the consolations of God too small
for you,
Even the word spoken gently with you?
12Why does your heart carry you away?
And why do your eyes flash,
13That you should turn your spirit
against God
And allow such words to go out of your
mouth?
14What is man, that he should be pure,
Or he who is born of a woman, that he
should be righteous?
15Behold, He puts no trust in His holy
ones,
And the heavens are not pure in His
sight;
16How much less one who is detestable
and corrupt,
Man, who drinks iniquity like water!

Read verses 7-16

Q: How are the opening rhetorical questions in v.7-8 sarcastic and accusatory rather than a legitimate attempt to edify or exhort?

A: They poetically accuse Job of possessing so great a personal pride that he has deceived himself into believing is not just wiser than everybody else, but has exclusive access to alone know God's thoughts and wisdom.

Q: Why does Eliphaz ask the rhetorical question, "Or were you brought forth before the hills?"

A: It is a reference to existing before creation. In Proverbs, it is specified that God's wisdom was present at this time, another reference to Job thinking he has a monopoly on God's Word and ways.

*"When there were no depths I [wisdom] was brought forth,
When there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills I was brought forth;
While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,
Nor the first dust of the world.*

— Proverbs 8:24-26

Q: What is particularly ironic about this where Eliphaz is concerned?

A: That is exactly what Eliphaz thinks of himself and he now proceeds to make that argument for himself and the others present in v.9-10.

Point: All too often the accuser is even more guilty of the accusations they bring. It was Eliphaz in Job 4:12-21 who testified that his words and wisdom came from a special revelation from God, and yet this is not acceptable for anyone else, much less Job.

Q: What does Eliphaz reveal in his accusation in v.11?

A: Eliphaz believes his words to be the very "consolations of God" and therefore when Job rebukes Eliphaz, he is really rebuking God's Word.

Q: What is even more ironic as expressed in v.11 where Eliphaz's own speech is concerned?

A: Eliphaz actually believes he has "spoken gently" with Job.

Point: Eliphaz is self-deceived where his own speech and behavior is concerned.

Q: How is this accusation carried out even further in v.12-13?

A: Eliphaz accuses Job of being so carried away by personal emotion that he has actually turned "against God". The result is that Job is not just deceived or acting out in the heat of the moment, but "allow such words to go out of your mouth" contrary to God's Word and ways.

Q: How does the emphasis change in v.14-16?

A: It's a kind of mini sermon to provide what Eliphaz believes to be sound theology backing him up.

Q: What is the basic contrast in these verses and how does it apply to Job?

A: It is applied to Job in a veiled accusation that he "drinks iniquity like water" to explain why he is neither "pure" nor "righteous" and therefore "detestable and corrupt".

For Discussion: Does God really put "no trust in His holy ones"? It would seem that at the outset from Job in God's discussion with Satan about him that God is, indeed, trusting Job. Is this the case?

17 "I will tell you, listen to me;
 And what I have seen I will also
 declare;
 18 What wise men have told,
 And have not concealed from their
 fathers,
 19 To whom alone the land was given,
 And no alien passed among them.
 20 The wicked man writhes in pain all
 his days,
 And numbered are the years stored up
 for the ruthless.
 21 Sounds of terror are in his ears;
 While at peace the destroyer comes
 upon him.
 22 He does not believe that he will
 return from darkness,
 And he is destined for the sword.
 23 He wanders about for food, saying,
 'Where is it?'
 He knows that a day of darkness is at
 hand.
 24 Distress and anguish terrify him,
 They overpower him like a king ready
 for the attack,
 25 Because he has stretched out his
 hand against God
 And conducts himself arrogantly
 against the Almighty.
 26 He rushes headlong at Him
 With his massive shield.
 27 For he has covered his face with his
 fat
 And made his thighs heavy with flesh.
 28 He has lived in desolate cities,
 In houses no one would inhabit,
 Which are destined to become ruins.
 29 He will not become rich, nor will his
 wealth endure;
 And his grain will not bend down to the
 ground.
 30 He will not escape from darkness;

Q: In stating "the heavens are not pure in His sight", is this saying that even heaven is somehow corrupt?

A: The underlying Hebrew word here translated as "heavens" is referring to the visible sky or atmosphere. It is not referring to the invisible heaven in eternity but to the visible creation we can all see.

Q: What might be wrong overall with the theology Eliphaz presents?

A: It doesn't actually apply to Job and this situation. But in reality, it is Eliphaz whose iniquity is twisting God's Word to suit himself rather than Job's iniquity working to corrupt him.

Application: One of the difficulties in dealing with **bad** friends or counselors is that they are **self-deceived** to believe they are responding from the right **motives** and therefore speaking for **God**.

Read verses 17-35

Q: How does Eliphaz characterize in v.17-19 what he is now going to tell Job?

- "I will tell you..."
- "...listen to me..."
- "...what I have seen..."
- "...I will also declare..."

Q: How does Eliphaz in this instance justify his own words as actually being those of God's?

A: He first asserts that his experiences perfectly conform to the true traditions and views of the fathers or patriarchs and is proven true by their inheritance.

Point: There is an obvious problem when an argument or teaching abandons being strictly defined by God's Word and instead substitutes the traditions and practices of perceived earthly authorities.

Q: What are the consequences Eliphaz asserts come to the wicked and ruthless?

- (v.20) "...writhes in pain all his days..."
- (v.20) "...numbered are the years..."
- (v.21) "Sounds of terror..."
- (v.21) "...the destroyer comes upon him."
- (v.22) "...does not believe..."
- (v.22) "...destined for the sword."
- (v.23) "...wanders about for food..."
- (v.23) "...knows that a day of darkness is at hand."
- (v.24) "...distress and anguish..."
- (v.28) "...lived in desolate cities...houses...destined to become ruins."
- (v.29) "...will not become rich..."
- (v.29) "...nor will his wealth endure."
- (v.29) "...his grain will not bend down to the ground."

Observation: This list summarizes the reason why the book of Job was the very first of all the books of the Bible given. In this early history before God's Word was codified, this is what was commonly believed, that any pain, suffering or trials were the direct result of one's sin and unrighteousness, and therefore not experienced by anyone who was righteous by God's standard. They did not understand Satan's overall role nor the concept of one's faith being tested like Job. They not only needed to understand the working of Satan in the world, but even more so the sovereignty of God.

Q: In v.25, to what does Eliphaz specify as the root cause of all these consequences?

- "...he has stretched out his hand against God..."
- "...he...conducts himself arrogantly against the Almighty."

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The flame will wither his shoots,
And by the breath of His mouth he will
go away.

³¹Let him not trust in emptiness,
deceiving himself;

For emptiness will be his reward.

³²It will be accomplished before his
time,

And his palm branch will not be green.

³³He will drop off his unripe grape like
the vine,

And will cast off his flower like the
olive tree.

³⁴For the company of the godless is
barren,

And fire consumes the tents of the
corrupt.

³⁵They conceive mischief and bring
forth iniquity,

And their mind prepares deception.”

In other words, it is a willful, rebellious spirit coming into direct conflict with God.

Application: *Eliphaz is not confronting someone he has caught in a red-handed act of sin but someone whose words disagree with his own. He insists that sin “must” be present even in the absence of any substantive proof because that would justify his assertions. How careful are we to distinguish this difference in others?*

Q: What does v.26 mean?

A: It is a way of stating that Job has rebelled to the point that he is actively attacking God.

Q: What does v.27 mean?

A: This is most likely a Hebrew idiom for personal wealth and prosperity.

Point: *This shows the inconsistency in Eliphaz’s thinking in that on the one hand he attributes Job’s loss of all earthly possessions to his sin and pride, but now offers that such sin and pride in his personal wealth has animated Job’s active rebellion against God.*

Q: According to v.31, how does self-deception come about?

A: By trusting “in emptiness”, another way of characterizing the things and ways of the world.

Q: According to Eliphaz, when will the reward of “emptiness” be experienced for trusting “in emptiness”?

A: He uses the metaphors of a palm branch, grape and flower in v.32-33 to assert it will take place in the course of this life “before his time”.

Q: How does v.34 suggest the effects of these behaviors on those around them?

A: The terms “company” and “tents” describe one’s close associates and family. This seems to be a thinly disguised way of saying, “No wonder you lost your entire family and antagonize those who have come to comfort you.”

Q: What are the ultimate results of Job’s present condition according to Eliphaz?

A: “...mischief...iniquity...deception...” (v.35) These summarize outward behavior toward others, outward behavior toward God, and the resulting overall spiritual state of both behaviors.

Application: *Eliphaz ultimately **acts** in the very manner for which he has **accused** Job: speaking from his own **experience** and **opinion** as if it is the Word and wisdom of **God**.*

Overall Application

- Are we careful to align a person’s speech with their observed actions? Do we sometimes assign behavior when we haven’t actually observed it in them?
- How well do we recognize when someone’s ill response is actually believed by them to be loving and biblical? How should we deal with this dilemma?
- How should we handle someone whose very arguments are not only self-contradictory, but even cross the line into being hypocritical?