

Introduction

There is a really important, personal application provided in the whole of the book of Job which begins to be presented here. As it turns out, Job is not the only one being tested. In the course of God's trials for any particular person or group, those who become involved, even those attempting to simply provide aid and comfort, are actually undergoing divine testing as well. One of the most valuable lessons from these pages is not just how we must faithfully cling to God's Word when undergoing trials in the character of Job, but equally how we must cling to God's Word when getting involved in the character of Job's friends. But what often betrays a failure to do so is when, in the course of our own engagement in the process, we become more concerned about ourselves than them. This can be seen when someone speaks presenting biblical advice or quoting Scripture, which instead of applying to the situation is a way to talk about and justify themselves. As it turns out, Job is not the only one being tested, and so it is in the course of real life. The comforters are being tested just as much as the afflicted.

¹Then Job answered,

²"Oh that my grief were actually weighed
And laid in the balances
together with my calamity!

³For then it would be heavier
than the sand of the seas;
Therefore my words have been rash.

⁴For the arrows of the Almighty
are within me,
Their poison my spirit drinks;
The terrors of God are arrayed
against me.

⁵Does the wild donkey bray over
his grass,
Or does the ox low over his
fodder?

⁶Can something tasteless be
eaten without salt,
Or is there any taste in the white
of an egg?

⁷My soul refuses to touch them;
They are like loathsome food to
me.

Read verses 1-7

Q: What is the point Job is dramatically attempting to communicate in v.2?

A: That he admits "my words have been rash" due to the enormity of what he is going through.

Application: When dealing with the afflicted, simply presenting the truth alone (as we see it) ignores the depth of what they may be experiencing physically and emotionally. When attending someone who has just been run over by a truck, we would never ignore the gravity of their condition to instead lecture them on the value of looking both ways before crossing the street.

Q: To what is Job directly responding?

A: When Job broke his silence as recorded in chapter 3, Eliphaz responded in chapter 5 that Job was both a simpleton and a fool, a dual reference to having neither the wisdom of God nor the wisdom of man. Job is attempting to point out that they are ignoring the actual pain and anguish of his suffering.

Q: How does this dovetail with Job's identification of the source of his condition in v.4-7?

A: Eliphaz's response followed up with the assumption that everything Job is experiencing is the result of his own sin and unresponsiveness to address it. In another very dramatic fashion, Job assigns the source as God alone.

Q: How might the illustrations Job presents in v.5-6 be a rebuttal to Eliphaz's primary argument in 5:2-7?

A: Eliphaz's argument was summarized, "man is born for trouble", (5:7) a reference to man's nature of sin. The illustrations presented here depict the source as God.

Q: Why does Job employ "the wild donkey" and "the ox"? How do they compare and contrast to each other?

A: The "wild donkey" is running free in nature and eating wild grass wherever it finds it naturally occurring; the "ox" is a domesticated animal being fed "fodder", something specifically prepared and given by its owner.

Point: This illustrates something about how and what Job has been fed with greater spiritual results. A wild donkey would never "bray"— that is, complain or protest over his everyday food, nor would an ox "low" over his normal feeding. It is a very poetic way of refuting the assertion that Job is uselessly complaining about that which has come about from his inherent predisposition to sin.

Q: So how is Job's rebuttal of Eliphaz and company extended into the examples of being "tasteless" in v.6?

A: It is a metaphorical way of stating that what they have served Job, by providing no actual compassion, is like tasteless food. There is no satisfaction received from what is being served by them.

Q: So what is present in the summary of v.7 which indicates this is really a greater, spiritual issue which he is addressing?

A: By the reference to his refusal as coming from "my soul".

Q: How does this affirm that what he is being fed is not either naturally occurring like the wild donkey's grass or prescribed fodder for the domesticated ox?

A: Because he finds it repulsive.

Observation: Christ did not literally feed people without spiritually feeding them. His compassion for their literal, physical state was always an extension of what He was working in them spiritually.

Application: The whole **bread** of truth, often represented in Scripture as metaphorical **bread**, is unpalatable in the absence of true **compassion**. When presented this way, it actually **blinds** the one offering the **bread**.

⁸“Oh that my request might
come to pass,
And that God would grant my
longing!
⁹Would that God were willing to
crush me,
That He would loose His hand
and cut me off!
¹⁰But it is still my consolation,
And I rejoice in unsparing pain,
That I have not denied the
words of the Holy One.
¹¹What is my strength, that I
should wait?
And what is my end, that I
should endure?
¹²Is my strength the strength of
stones,
Or is my flesh bronze?
¹³Is it that my help is not within
me,
And that deliverance is driven
from me?

Read verses 8-13

Q: What had Eliphaz previously asserted was the last and most terrible punishment possible?

A: Death. (Job 4:9, 20, 21; 5:2)

Q: Why do you suppose that in Job’s case, he does not see death as a punishment in the ways presented by Eliphaz?

A: Death can only be a punishment if one dies in sin, which is eternal separation from God. For the righteous, death in this life is actually eternal life with God in the next life.

Q: What was Job’s original desire in 3:3-10?

A: That he had never been born.

Q: And to what did this desire escalate in 3:11-19?

A: If he had to be born, then an early death, the earlier the better.

Q: In this sequence, what is Job requesting here?

A: A speedy and immediate death.

Q: Has Job made these requests because he just wants to bring an end to the physical pain and suffering?

A: In v.10 he expresses his greater fear that the physical suffering will accomplish something even more devastating spiritually, that he will eventually deny “the words of the Holy One”.

Q: Some may point out that there were no books of the Bible, much less the whole Bible, available to Job at this time. So how can he be speaking about “the words of the Holy One”?

A: The “words” of God are the commands which He has made known to man in whatever fashion God has revealed them. Job is referring to all that God has revealed to that point, which as we are learning from the book of Job, is actually quite extensive.

Application: How well do we realize that even in the midst of our most intense trials and testing, that the most important thing is not just faith in God in general, but His Word in particular?

Q: How do v.11-13 affirm Job’s greatest fear?

A: He knows the limitations of man and is worried a time is quickly coming when he will not be able to maintain spiritual integrity where God’s Word is concerned.

Q: In 5:18-26, Eliphaz suggested to Job that he could be completely restored. Why does his response in v.11-13 reject this?

A: Eliphaz’s suggestion was conditional, based on whether or not Job would recognize, admit and repent from his sin. Job, knowing that there is no sin involved, does not yet know what will cause this situation to come to an end.

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14“For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friend;
So that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty.
15My brothers have acted deceitfully like a wadi,
Like the torrents of wadis which vanish,
16Which are turbid because of ice
And into which the snow melts.
17When they become waterless, they are silent,
When it is hot, they vanish from their place.
18The paths of their course wind along,
They go up into nothing and perish.
19The caravans of Tema looked, The travelers of Sheba hoped for them.
20They were disappointed for they had trusted,
They came there and were confounded.
21Indeed, you have now become such,
You see a terror and are afraid.
22Have I said, ‘Give me something,’
Or, ‘Offer a bribe for me from your wealth,’
23Or, ‘Deliver me from the hand of the adversary,’
Or, ‘Redeem me from the hand of the tyrants’?

Application: Trials are not really a **physical** test of endurance, but a **spiritual** one. It is testing the limits of **faith** in God’s Word and ways by way of **physical** distress.

Read verses 14-23

Q: Why doesn’t Job’s complaint about his friends’ actions begin with their failure to address any of his physical, financial, or otherwise worldly afflictions?

A: Such are temporal issues. They have failed on the more important spiritual issue where their lack of sensitivity and kindness leads the victim to the possibility of permanent damage by forsaking “*the fear of the Almighty*” in shaping their response.

Q: What is the term Job employs in v.15 which clearly describes Job’s view that their greater failure is in the spiritual arena?

A: He says that they “*have acted deceitfully*”— that is, misrepresenting the spiritual nature of what has taken place to the point that it leads the sufferer away from God.

Q: And what is the picture Job uses to express this failure?

A: “*...like a wadi*”. (v.15)

Q: What is a wadi?

A: In desert regions, it is a riverbed which only bears water seasonally, but because of its desert locale, is normally dry, especially during the hottest times of the year.

Q: What are the chief characteristics of a wadi as described in v.15-18? How do they describe Job’s point of view where his friends and their actions are concerned?

1. (v.15) “*...torrents...which vanish...*” In times of rain, they quickly fill up and actually become dangerous, but then just as quickly will return to being completely dry and empty. It describes, at best, his friends only being useful for the briefest of moments, but in reality not just of no help, but bordering on dangerous.
2. (v.16-17) Wadis are “*turbid*” when full, but then “*silent*” when empty. Job’s friends are proving to alternate from extreme noise to absolute silence, thus rendering whatever they are presenting to be ineffective.
3. (v.18) “*...paths...wind along...go up into nothing and perish*”. His friends are useless guides leading to a dangerous, deadly end. There is no navigational help from a wadi.

Point: Like a wadi, Job’s friends provide no sustainable source of water, the advice they provide is either irritating noise or useless silence, and the ultimate destination to which they are trying to take Job is both a spiritual and literal dead end.

Q: What is the greater concept Job is trying to get across in v.19-20 in using “the caravans of Tema” and “the travelers of Sheba”?

A: As desert travelers, always on the lookout for sources of water, they will find themselves deceived if they trust in a wadi. Job is likewise saying if he trusts in his friends who are acting in the character of a wadi, instead of being comforted or reconciled, he will end up deceived.

Q: How do we know for sure that Job is applying the metaphor of the wadi directly to his friends?

A: In v.21 he states it directly, “you have now become such”.

Q: If Job is the one who is experiencing unspeakable personal loss followed by unbearable physical anguish, why should his friends be afraid?

A: Job says they have become afraid because “you see a terror” (v.21)—that is, they believe that what they are seeing in Job is divine vengeance. They have come to believe in a completely erroneous interpretation of what is actually taking place. They don’t see Job as a victim to be pitied, but an object of terror to be dealt with.

Q: What is one of the proofs Job provides to support his assertion that they are wrong about him?

A: The list in v.22-23 confirms that Job never asked for anything for himself, never asked for anyone to act on his behalf, nor even to react against the earthly agents who wrongly took everything from him.

Point: *In other words, unlike a worldly person, Job has not made an issue of his worldly losses, but has consistently demonstrated his greater concern for what is taking place spiritually. Can the recovery from worldly loss, for a believer, be accomplished in the absence of spiritual restoration? And even then, is it guaranteed?*

Application: *Divine trials can be just as much a test for the **comforters** as those needing to be **comforted**. We must guard against turning it into an **opportunity** to focus on our own fears and weaknesses, turning them back upon the actual **victim** of the situation.*

²⁴“Teach and I will be silent;
 And show me how I have erred.
²⁵How painful are honest words!
 But what does your argument
 prove?
²⁶Do you intend to reprove my
 words,
 When the words of one in
 despair belong to the wind?
²⁷You would even cast lots for
 the orphans
 And barter over your friend.
²⁸Now please look at me,
 And see if I lie to your face.
²⁹Desist now, let there be no
 injustice;
 Even desist, my righteousness is
 yet in it.
³⁰Is there injustice on my
 tongue?
 Cannot my palate discern
 calamities?

Read verses 24-30

Q: What are the greater contrasting themes in this passage?

1. Job begins by addressing how he might become silent, but concludes by requesting their silence.
2. There is the contrast between Job’s words and their words, highlighted by such contrasts as “erred” vs. “honest” and “injustice” vs. “righteousness”.

Q: To what does Job contend their words will inevitably lead?

A: To “injustice”. (v.29 & 30)

Q: Is Job describing divine injustice?

A: In this context, Job is making the case that their mistreatment of him is producing a condition of sin in them. On the rare occasion they have used “honest words” (v.25), their overall result has been turned back upon them.

Q: What is the greater spiritual condition which Job assigns to his friends in v.27?

A: This is a poetic way of describing their heartlessness.

Q: How is that borne out in the examples given in v.27?

A: This is describing a pitiless person casting lots for the children of an insolvent debtor. Because the debtor is condemned to lifelong slavery, the picture is of unscrupulous persons purposely taking advantage of the debtor in order to reap the benefit of also getting his now orphaned children. They not only get the debtor as a slave for life, but his children as well.

Point: This is an extremely unflattering picture Job is painting of his friends very early in the overall book of Job; it will get much darker and even far more personal.

Application: Even **truth**— applied out of context— is damaging, but even more so when it is actually applied for **personal** reasons disguised as an **outreach** to the sufferer.

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Overall Application

- Do you think that your involvement with others leaves you detached and separate from the situation? How well do you realize that you are being evaluated by God just as much as they are?
- Have you ever given advice or quoted Scripture to someone which in reality you are using to justify yourself? Or experienced this from someone, who seems to be more concerned for elevating their self than you? What is this revealing?
- Consider such situations as when we must provide long-term medical care for a parent or loved one. Do we recognize that their personal test of endurance and faith is actually producing our own personal test in such matters?

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