

# OpenTheo

## April 17th: Job 15 & Hebrews 7

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Eliphaz rebukes Job for his arrogance. A priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

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## Transcript

Job chapter 15 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge, And fill his belly with the east wind? Should he argue in unprofitable talk, Or in words with which he can do no good? But you are doing away with the fear of God, And hindering meditation before God. For your iniquity teaches your mouth, And you choose the tongue of the crafty. Your own mouth condemns you, and not I. Your own lips testify against you.

Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? Have you listened in the counsel of God? And do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? Both the grey-haired and the aged are among us, older than your father. Are the comforts of God too small for you? Or the word that deals gently with you? Why does your heart carry

you away? Why do your eyes flash, that you turn your spirit against God, and bring such words out of your mouth? What is man that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman that he can be righteous? Behold God puts no trust in His holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in His sight. How much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water? I will show you, hear me, and what I have seen I will declare, what wise men have told without hiding it from their fathers, to whom alone the land was given, and no stranger passed among them.

The wicked man writhes in pain all his days, through all the years that are laid up for the ruthless. Dreadful sounds are in his ears. In prosperity the destroyer will come upon him.

He does not believe that he will return out of darkness, and he is marked for the sword. He wanders abroad for bread, saying, Where is it? He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand. Distress and anguish terrify him.

They prevail against him like a king ready for battle, because he has stretched out his hand against God, and defies the Almighty, running stubbornly against him with a thickly barst shield, because he has covered his face with his fat, and gathered fat upon his waist, and has lived in desolate cities, in houses that none should inhabit, which were ready to become heaps of ruins. He will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the earth. He will not depart from darkness.

The flame will dry up his chutes, and by the breath of his mouth he will depart. Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself, for emptiness will be his payment. It will be paid in full before his time, and his branch will not be green.

He will shake off his unripe grape like the vine, and cast off his blossom like the olive tree, for the company of the godless is barren, and fire consumes the tents of bribery. They conceive trouble, and give birth to evil, and their womb prepares deceit. Job chapter 15 begins the second cycle of speeches.

Once again Eliphaz, who is likely the oldest of the friends, opens this new cycle of dialogues. Bildad will come next, and then Zophar. Eliphaz's speech is once again the longest of the speeches of the friends within this particular cycle.

The speech can be divided into two halves. The first half in verses 2-16 is a rebuke of Job, and the second, in verses 17-35, is a portrayal of the wicked man. Job is directly addressed in the first half, but Eliphaz's more powerful statements perhaps are found in the insinuations of the second, which portray the wicked man in the third person.

But, as Norman Harbell observes, Eliphaz is carefully picking up on the language of Job's earlier speeches in his characterisation of the wicked man. By so doing, he is presenting Job with a picture in which he might recognise elements of his own personality, things that might cause him to reconsider his approach. Eliphaz here adopts a much more

confrontational tone than he did in his earlier speech of chapters 4 and 5. He began that speech as follows.

If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? Behold you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient.

It touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your way your hope? Eliphaz had been much more gentle and exhortational in his original speech, but now his tone has markedly changed. Perhaps the change of tone is a sign that Eliphaz feels wounded by the way that Job has responded to his earlier counsel.

Eliphaz speaks as if he is genuinely dismayed by Job's response. Job is supposed to be a wise man, yet he is speaking empty, hollow words, coming out with mere hot air. And in the process he is actually threatening true religion.

You are doing away with the fear of the Lord, and hindering meditation before God, as he says in verse 4. Job's speech seems to arise not from the deep meditation of a godly heart, but from sin and vexation. His own words are evidence enough against him that he is not in the right. One of the questions that is at stake in the discourse is the true source of wisdom.

In his first speech, Eliphaz had put forward a vision that he had received. Bildad had emphasized the wisdom of the ancients and the tradition, and Zophar had talked about the deeper wisdom of God. Job had acted as if he could gainsay them all.

Eliphaz now attacks Job's approach to wisdom. Job is acting as if he was the first man who was born. Such a man, unlike all subsequent men, was not born of a woman, but was directly created by God himself, and as a result, has some privileged knowledge.

The first man has some knowledge of the primordial order. He was there before the mountains were brought forth. We might think here of the description of wisdom herself in Proverbs chapter 8 verse 25.

Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth. The first man might have claimed access to the divine counsel, hearing the wisdom of God directly from the source. Such a man might have been able to claim a privileged monopoly upon certain knowledge.

But Job is clearly not that man. Yet, Eliphaz suggests, he acts as if he were. In chapter 13 verses 1 to 2, Job had said, Behold, my eye has seen all this, my ear has heard and understood it.

What you know I also know. I am not inferior to you. The strong implication of Job's statement was that he knew more than his friends.

He was able to challenge and dismiss their opinions. Eliphaz rebukes Job as exhibiting a sort of youthful hubris. There are other wise men around, Eliphaz and perhaps others of the friends, who are older than Job's father.

Job's attitude in dismissing the knowledge of such men just seems arrogant. In his original response to Job, Eliphaz had tried to deal quite gently with him. Although in his ignorance his words were ill tailored for Job's situation, it may seem that he was nonetheless well intentioned and kindly disposed to Job.

He had tried to present Job with what he calls the comforts of God, by means of a word that deals gently. If Job wasn't receptive to that, Eliphaz fears that he might be closed off to reason more generally. Eliphaz was confirmed in this impression by Job's spirited and passionate response.

The accusatory tone in Job's response to God troubles him. It seems quite unfitting. In Eliphaz's first speech in chapter 4 in verses 17 to 19, he had presented the content of the vision that he had received in the night.

Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth? In concluding the first half of his second speech to Job, Eliphaz returns to these points. Before the infinitely holy God, how can Job imagine himself to be pure? Man is, as the prophet Isaiah described himself, a person of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips.

A human being drinks injustice like water. Injustice and sin and iniquity is native to him. No such man could ever presume to be righteous or pure before God.

Clearly God has found some fault in Job, and rather than appealing against the Lord's judgement, Job clearly needs to humble himself beneath the Lord's hand of discipline. The second half of Eliphaz's second speech is a presentation of the figure of the wicked with a series of images in succession. Eliphaz begins in verses 17 and 19 by stating the grounds upon which he feels legitimated in presenting his wisdom.

Eliphaz's earlier wisdom was drawn from a vision, but he argues here that it is consistent with the wisdom of the ancients. He is not departing from the tradition, he is teaching consistently with it. This is what wise men have passed down, consistent with the teaching of their fathers, a tradition that has a pristine source, in a time when the land was free from the influence of foreign thought.

As noted earlier, throughout the second half of his speech, Eliphaz is picking up on

elements of Job's own speeches, mirroring Job's own self-descriptions back to him in the figure of the wicked. So for instance, in chapter 3 verse 25, Job has said, For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. Eliphaz begins his portrayal of the wicked in verses 20 to 24 with a man who dreads and fears his doom.

This man is paranoid, he knows that destruction is about to come upon him. Every day he anticipates the blow about to fall. He knows that he is at odds with cosmic justice, and by God's moral governance he will experience his comeuppance.

He is fatalistic in his thoughts. He is convinced that if he is overtaken by darkness, he will by no means escape from it. Long before the reality comes upon him, he is terrorized by the anticipations of it.

From this, Eliphaz moves to another portrayal in verses 25 to 27. Here is a man who sets himself up against God, who in his arrogance boldly defies the Almighty. Like a warrior, he charges at God with his shield before him.

Yet for all his pride and boasting, he is grossly overweight and ill-suited for the fight. Job made talk a proud talk on his behalf, yet it is clear that he is utterly unprepared for the confrontation. In verses 28 to 31, the portrait shifts to one of desolation and emptiness.

This wicked man is doomed to live in desolate places and wildernesses. He gains no real wealth and leaves no legacy. He is fated to futility, his work will be consumed, and his life will vanish like breath from his mouth.

The fruitlessness of the wicked becomes even clearer in verses 32 to 34. This is a man cut off before his time. Well before the proper time for harvest, before he has actually been able to bring forth fruit, he is cut off, doomed to barrenness and destruction like all of the wicked.

Eliphaz began his speech by talking about Job bringing forth hot air from his belly, as if giving birth to his foolish words. In concluding, he returns to another theme of conception and birth. The wicked man is one who conceives, as if within a womb, deceit.

Job, Eliphaz is insinuating, is a man whose heart is not right and all of his other problems are arising from that. A question to consider. Can you think of any parts of Job's statements to this point that Eliphaz might be alluding to in the second part of his speech? See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils.

And those descendants of Levi who received the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man, who does not have his descent from them, received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood, for under it the people received the law, what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well.

For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life, for it is witnessed of him, you are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

For on the one hand a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law made nothing perfect, but on the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him, the Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest for ever.

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. Consequently he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a son who has been made perfect for ever.

In chapter 7 the author of Hebrews moves on to discuss the character of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is relevant to his discussion, because he quoted Psalm 110 verses 1-4 earlier on. The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.

The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies. Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power.

In holy garments from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.

Having introduced this difficult text into the discussion, the author of Hebrews wants to consider the character of Melchizedek and what his priesthood tells us about the priesthood of Christ. Melchizedek is a strange and unexpected figure. He only appears once, and rather abruptly, in an Old Testament narrative, at a surprising and significant juncture, yet without any real explanation in the text.

We find him in Genesis chapter 14 verses 14-20. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hoba, north of Damascus.

Then he brought back all the women and the people. After his return from the defeat of Chedulema and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Sheba, that is, the king's valley. And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine.

He was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Melchizedek is a mysterious character, and the fact that he is mentioned as he is in Psalm 110 verse 4 is probably testimony to the fact that he was already a source of interest long before the book of Hebrews was ever written. Having seen the significance of Psalm 110 verse 4, we are propelled back into Genesis chapter 14 to consider why Melchizedek might actually be raised as a figure of importance. Even within that text, there are ways that he stands out.

First of all, we notice that he is given no introduction. He appears briefly on the page of the text, and then vanishes, almost as suddenly as he had first appeared. However, he quite clearly stands out from the character of the king of Sodom.

While Abram refuses to receive anything from the king of Sodom, lest the king of Sodom say that he had made Abram rich, not only does he receive a blessing from this character, Melchizedek the king of Salem, he also gives him a tithe of everything that he has. Elsewhere, the tithe is always given to God or to the appointed priests. Yet here is a figure who has not descended from Abraham, who is receiving this tribute of a tenth as the priest, and is also blessing Abram.

He is identified as the priest of God Most High, he is a priest of the true God, yet he is not someone who belongs to the Levitical priesthood that will later be established. Indeed,

we are given no details of his genealogy or what qualifies him for his role. By itself, this would invite much reflection.

However, when we look even more at the context, further things open up. Many of the stories of Genesis, and particularly the story of Abraham, have anticipatory qualities. They play out the story of the descendants of Abraham in advance.

In chapter 12, Abram goes into the land, there is a famine that leads him away from the land, he goes down to Egypt, there are plagues upon Pharaoh, and then he is let out with many gifts. He goes back to the land of Canaan, which was inhabited by the Canaanites at the time. He spies out the land, the Lord declares that he will give the land to him.

Having separated from his nephew Lot, Lot is then captured. Abram wins a great victory against those who have captured Lot, and engages in a sort of conquest of the entire land. And having done all of that, he is met by the king of Jerusalem, who comes bearing bread and wine.

He is described as a priest of God Most High, and then he blesses Abram and receives a tithe. As a figure in the story, Abram represents his descendants. They are going to be delivered from Egypt, they are going to spy out the land, and then they are going to win a great conquest in it.

And finally, they will arrive at Jerusalem. But just at the point where we would expect Abram, representing his descendants, including the tribe of Levi, to take centre stage, we have this other mysterious figure. And that, I believe, is why he is seen to be so significant.

The point is not that the character of Melchizedek was necessarily some miraculous figure. Rather, it's what he stands for as a figure. Whoever he was as a historical person, he stands for so much more in the context of the text and the way it has been told.

He is clearly anticipating and standing for something very important, yet it is very mysterious to us. Much as we might wonder about the significance of the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah and the importance of the ram caught in the thicket and other details like that, we might wonder about the character of Melchizedek. Who does he represent? What does he stand for? Why is this figure presented as someone who is greater than Abraham, who takes the centre stage at this very important moment? Of course, as he is the king of Salem, he might make us think of David, who became the king of Jerusalem.

The priest-king of Jerusalem corresponds to a Davidic messiah that will arise. And having been raised up as this character, as a king of righteousness and peace, he will bring about something that eclipses the Levitical priesthood. Consequently, although Christ does not fulfil the requirements for the Levitical priesthood, he can belong to a different



type of priesthood, a different order, the order of Melchizedek.

He is the one who is prefigured by this character within the story of Genesis chapter 14. And once this foreshadowing is appreciated, so many of the mysteries and conundrums of the story of Genesis 14 fall into place. We begin to understand what this mysterious character of Melchizedek is doing there at that juncture.

We also begin to understand better Psalm 110 verse 4, why this great figure who is elevated might be described as having the priesthood of Melchizedek. And now that we have an eternal priest according to this order, we no longer need the Levitical priesthood, which was only temporary. That priesthood was never going to bring perfection.

And in contrast with that priesthood, appointment to this priesthood comes with an oath. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever.

Because Christ is an eternal priest according to the order of Melchizedek, he is able to bring us to God in a far greater way than any of the Levitical priests could do. Not just because they were sinful, but because their priesthood was limited. His priesthood eclipses theirs.

He is so much more suited as a high priest to bring us to God. He is one who is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He is like the unblemished lamb, the one that can represent people and bring them into God's presence.

He is the one who participates fully in flesh, but is not stained by its sin. And as a result, he can represent us fully and compassionately enter into our life, while still being able to act in a powerfully vicarious manner for us. As he is separated from sin, he does not need to offer sacrifices for himself first, nor indeed does he need to offer repeated sacrifices for the people.

He offered himself once and for all as a complete and perfect sacrifice, one that was perfectly suited to bring people to God. The law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of God's oath, which comes later than the law and surpasses the law, appoints this Son, the one who has been perfected forever. He is the one by whom we can be brought fully into the presence of God.

A question to consider. What role is the immortality of Christ playing in the author of Hebrew's argument?