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Job 3 - 5



Job - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the concept of wisdom in the book of Job, particularly in chapters 3-5. He notes that while the wisdom literature suggests excellent advice, it may not always be applicable in every situation. He also comments on the perception that suffering is a punishment from God and points out that even though Job's friends believed in this theology, it did not equate to being accurate. Gregg reminds listeners that Jesus taught against worrying and the Bible instructs us not to fear, and encourages us to seek God's will in our day-to-day living.

Transcript

We're turning now to Job chapter 3, and in the first two chapters, we see that he was silent for seven days with his friends after having had a very noble response initially to those waves of suffering that came upon him, the loss of his livestock, which was a man's wealth. It's like having all your money invested in the stock market, and the stock market just totally crashes, and you have nothing left. That all happened to him in one day, and then the same day, he lost all ten of his children.

That, and even the loss of one child would leave a man reeling, and have all of his children, his whole progeny, cut off in a single day, the same day that he lost all his wealth. This information came to him in rapid succession, and then apparently not very much afterward, he lost his health as well. He didn't only get sick, he became sick with a tormenting skin ailment that was continually erupting and itching and painful in his bones, too.

Apparently, the condition penetrated deeper than just the skin. We don't know the exact condition, but we know that the man was in all respects miserable. And yet every time something happened to him, he responded heroically.

The first time when he lost all his possessions, he said, the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. And the second time when he lost his health, his wife actually saw him in misery and said, why don't you just curse God and die? Apparently, their view was that he would curse God.

God would kill him and put him out of his misery, as it were. And she thought, well, that would certainly be better than suffering as you are now. And he told her that her advice was not wise, it was foolish, and that they should be prepared to receive the good things and the tragedies from the hand of God.

And in both of these cases, in chapters one and two, it says that Job did not sin with his mouth. He did not charge God foolishly. His responses were commended and we can see why they were.

They were very heroic responses. And then we find that his friends, three friends, we don't know the basis of their earlier friendship. And it's amazing to think they would still be friends after this encounter because they were insulting to him.

But it does appear that he forgave them at the end and they remained friends. These men came from apparently three different tribes or different countries even and had made an appointment to come and see him. They had heard about his tragedy.

They had assumed apparently that visiting him one at a time was not as much to be desired as if they would come as a committee to talk with him. They all had pretty much an agreement among themselves, as it turns out, that doesn't come out until they begin to speak. But they all agreed on one thing, and that was that the theological orthodoxy of their time suggested that only men who are sinful suffer.

Because God is good and God would not allow an innocent man to suffer when he doesn't deserve it. There is a just God in heaven, and therefore, if there is a great deal of grief in a man's life, he must deserve it somehow. He must have done something egregious.

And that is what his friends believe. They apparently have talked among themselves before coming to visit him. We see that they made an appointment to come together.

So they had communicated. They probably had compared notes, maybe even had prepared speeches. Because they do give speeches and the speeches they give are fairly well reasoned discourses, and they're also given in poetry.

Now, when we think of poetry, we think of perhaps rhyme, which is in English, the main characteristic of poetry is rhyming. In Hebrew poetry, rhyme is not an important element. What is important is the parallelism of thought, the repetition of the same thing, two different ways.

The ability of a man to say something one way and say the same thing another way, and maybe even the same thing a third or fourth way. Sometimes there's three or four parallel members of a poetic stanza. This is what was pleasing to the ear of the Middle Eastern person.

It's hard to know, really, before you become acquainted with the culture, what they will find pleasant to the ear, because it's difficult to know why we find certain things pleasant to our ear. Why do certain tunes and arrangements of notes appeal to us and others do not? Why do we take delight in certain limericks and rhymes and poetry that we would not take equal delight in if it was just in prose? It's an aesthetic sense that is partly due to our cultural conditioning, and their cultural conditioning took delight in being able to hear the same thought expressed two ways or more. That was the mark of a poetic man.

And these men had poetic speeches, and so did Job. They were all wise men. They were all what we would today call philosophers, and they were religious philosophers.

They were all believers in God. They all believe the same theology. Even Job did.

They all believe that God is just and that God is sovereign and that God is the one who disposes providence to man, blessings and disasters. What they did not all agree about is that this somehow translates into a case against Job, against his innocence. Only Job knew that he had no secret sins.

Only Job knew that he had not done anything to deserve this. His friends lived far away. They didn't know what Job had been doing.

They only saw the result. And so they deduced from their theological orthodoxy that this must be a punishment from God for something he had done. They just didn't know what it was he had done.

Well, he didn't either. And in fact, he was fairly sure that as he reviewed his past behavior, that he had been quite circumspect. He'd been very conscientious.

He had done everything that he had always done, which was, you know, he lived a blameless life. The Bible says even God said that about Job. God said that to the devil.

He said Job's a blameless and upright man. He fears God and he avoids evil. So this is what Job was.

And that's what Job knew himself to be. And that was what's so confusing to him, because he had always pretty much shared the same theological viewpoint his friends had. That if you're suffering, it must be because you're evil.

And that was a strong incentive to do good. But was it the only incentive to do good? And that's really what the question of the book of Job is. Was Job doing good only because there were blessings involved in it? And that's what the devil had raised as a question with God.

He said, does Job serve you for nothing? He's serving you because you're blessing him. Well, there may have been an element of that. I mean, that was the idea.

Wise men knew that if you want things to go well, you should keep God on your side and keeping God on your side means you do the right thing. But what if what if you do the right things and and you don't get rewarded? What if you do the right things and everything goes wrong? Is there still reason to serve God? That is the question. Would someone serve God if there were no rewards? Would you? Would you be a Christian if there was no heaven or hell? Every Christian needs to ask themselves that, because that's that's not really the it's not the case.

I mean, it is not the case that there is no heaven or hell there is. But if there was not, would you still find any reasons to serve God? Well, the Bible indicates you should, because God is worthy. That's the point.

You serve God because he's worthy to be served. You serve God because he's good and it's right to do what is right in the sight of your creator. That's the reason to serve God.

Yes, there are rewards and there are punishments in the end. But are those really the only reason we serve God? And that was the question raised by Job. And that's what we're finding out here through Job's trials.

He had served God in prosperity. He had served God in good health. God had blessed him.

And now he continued to serve God and be faithful to God, even though God had taken those things away. But he did so with a confused mind because it didn't fit his theological assumptions, nor his friends. And while Job realized that this thing is changing all the paradigms, that this experience is challenging an old orthodoxy.

And then he has to rethink what he had once thought about the way God disposes things to man. His friends didn't feel compelled to rethink it because for all they knew, this might fit their orthodoxy. Job might be and probably was sinful.

Only Job and God knew whether that was true or not, but his friends didn't. And so they didn't feel compelled to change or to rethink their theology. And Job, knowing more than they did, namely his own innocence, he did have to rethink his theology and he rethinks it.

And so this is an interesting book. It's a challenging book. It's not a simplistic treatment of the subject of what you know, how God disposes his benefits and so forth.

And and yet it is part of the wisdom literature of Israel and in other wisdom literature like Proverbs and Psalms and Ecclesiastes, you do find the same propositions affirmed that Job's friends affirm. It's not unusual at all. Take a psalm like Psalm 37, which basically says, you know, the righteous will be rewarded, the wicked will be rooted out of the earth.

I've been young and I'm old, yet I've never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread. And yet, have there ever been righteous people who seemed to be forsaken, who seem to have to beg their bread? I haven't seen them either, but that doesn't mean they've never existed. The point is, the wisdom literature of Israel makes these propositions in a sweeping and seemingly universalistic way.

But what they're really saying is this is the tendency of things in life. It is there are certain tendencies, there are certain cause and effect things that generally can be anticipated. And therefore, if you want certain effects, you would be wise to pursue it in this way rather than some other way.

You want to be rich, then you should be diligent and work because the hand of the diligent shall bear rule. You want to be poor, then you should just be lazy because the lazy man will come to poverty. These are the things that the wisdom literature says.

But there are exceptions. There are lazy men who inherit fortunes and there are diligent men who experience crop failures. So the wisdom literature is telling us what is generally true and what is generally excellent advice.

If there's a certain result you want, here's what you ought to do. But to say that God's providence is somehow hemmed in and boxed into this little paradigm. And that God is not sovereign and free to do something else if he wishes is what their theology had never considered.

And, you know, the book of Job almost is like a almost a corrective to the wrong approach to wisdom literature. Because Christians often take the Proverbs or some of the promises themselves. They'll take them as prophecies or divine promises as if they are universal guarantees.

And that's exactly how Job's friends took those same kinds of issues. Everybody knows that those issues are generally true. But Job's friends thought they were universally true.

And the book of Job tells us that's not a safe assumption. These things which are generally true are not always universally true. God can step outside the box and do something different.

And in a sense, the book of Job and seeing the mistake Job's counselors make gives us sort of a grid through which to read Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and the other wisdom literature. To recognize that wisdom is one thing, promises of God are another thing. And yet wisdom is a very important thing because it is one of the ways, probably the main way in day by day living that God's will is known to us.

What's the wise choice to make? And we continually purchasing choices, traveling choices, you know, choice of what to wear when we go outside. We don't pray about this every time. Should I wear my jacket today or not? Oh, it looks cold.

I'll put on my coat. That's wisdom. Wisdom is the primary thing that guides us in probably 99 percent of all of our decisions.

Because in most things, we don't need special guidance. We don't need a prophecy from God about whether to eat cornflakes or to eat hot dogs for breakfast. I mean, I'm not sure one of those is more wise than the other.

But the point is that we don't make decisions on that based on special revelation. We do it on basis of what seems to be suited to our need at the moment. That's wisdom.

And so wisdom has its place in the book of Job helps us to see what that place is. It is it is a limited place, although it's an important place. We can't live without wisdom, but we can't assume that the rules that we think of as, you know, the rules of wisdom are so rigid that God is somehow bound by them and can't do something unexpected.

Now, God cannot do something outside his character. God cannot violate himself, his own character. Therefore, God cannot ever do anything that's really unjust.

And that's what the problem is here. God is just and he cannot be unjust. And yet to Job and his friends, it seems as if for God to let a man suffer who has been good is an unjust thing.

Now, we know that God is just and that he recompenses all things. Ultimately, they didn't know what we know about the afterlife. They didn't know about the day of judgment.

They didn't know that there's a recompense in the resurrection. These things have not been revealed yet at this early time. Job is probably the earliest book of the Bible to be written.

Therefore, Job and his friends had no Bible to read. They didn't know about eternal life. They didn't know about rewards after death.

We know because Jesus taught us those things. It's Jesus who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. We read in the New Testament and immortality had not been brought to light before that.

It was true, but it had never been brought to light. People have never seen it. And therefore, they had to speculate, how can God be just if I'm being good and only bad things happen to me? Now, we know there's an answer, and that is that God has an all an eternity after this life in which he can settle the scores and square the deal and, you know, balance the books.

And God is just. But because they didn't know that, they didn't know about these other options that God has. They had to try to fit God into the small box of what their

philosophy would allow.

And that is a mistake. Now, Job and his friends are silent for seven days. His friends are very sympathetic.

They wail when they see the condition he's in. They are stunned in silence and and show great patience and sympathy, entering into a state of mourning with him for seven days. But Job is the one himself who breaks the silence.

These men might have already had their prepared speeches ready for Job. But they were sensitive enough not to bring them up prematurely. Once Job speaks, they feel, OK, it's time to start getting the conversation going.

And when Job speaks, essentially, this whole third chapter is just Job cursing the day he was born. Now, what the devil wanted Job to do is curse God. The devil had said to God, if you do these things or let me do these things to Job, he will curse you to your face.

That's what he's hoping. He never did curse God. But he did curse the day he was born.

We might say, well, that comes dangerously close to cursing God, because the day you were born was decided by God. You're in a sense complaining about God's providence. But apparently in God's sight, complaining about one's circumstances is not the same thing as cursing God.

Now, you know, there is such a thing as understanding God's providence so much that we realize that we shouldn't really even whine about our providences, about the things God has done. If we don't like our lot in life, that we should accept it. Paul said, I've learned whatever state I am in therewith to be content.

If I've learned how to be abased, I've learned how to abound in all these things, I've learned, you know, to be content. That's, of course, in Philippians chapter four, which I assume you're familiar with. But let me just show it, because Paul makes it clear that he doesn't see any reason to whine.

About what God has dished out to him, he said in Philippians four, verses 11 and 12 and 13. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content, I know how to be abased. That means I know how to be reduced to nothing.

I know how to abound. I mean, I know how to be blessed with great abundance everywhere and in all things. I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And perhaps this is where Paul had an advantage Job did not. Job didn't know Christ.

Through Christ who strengthens me, I can I can have any kind of trial and accept it, not

by my own strength, but by the strength that Christ gives. Job was pretty much left to his own strength and his strength was great. It was not infinite.

And he therefore did reach a breaking point over in chapter six and verse 12. Job says, is my strength the strength of stones or is my flesh bronze? In other words, how much abuse do you think I can take? And he says this basically to respond to one of his friends, Eliphaz, who has kind of begun to accuse Job of doing something wrong to deserve these disasters. And Job's saying, listen, I've had one disaster after another.

I mean, now I have to experience the disaster of you falsely accusing me. How much do you think I can take? Is my strength the strength of stones? And his strength was not the strength of stones. He was a man.

He was not a perfect man in the sense of able to endure all things without complaining. But he was a perfect man in the sense that he was seeking to obey God in all things. He was referring his all things to God.

He was even looking to God through this whole thing. His friends talk about God, but Job is continually talking to God in his speeches. There's a lot of you in Job's speeches that are addressed to God, a watcher of men, as he calls God.

So Job at least has not given up on talking with God or seeking to maintain his relationship with God. His friends are speaking about God in the third person as if someone they've heard, you know, they have a theological position about. Job has a relationship with God.

That's what he's complaining about. That relationship seems to be thrown into confusion by what appears to be uncharacteristic dealings of God and ones that seem on the face of them unjust. After this, chapter three, verse one, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.

And Job spoke and said, may the day perish on which I was born and the night in which it was said a male child is conceived. May that day be darkness. May God above not seek it, nor the light shine upon it.

May darkness and the shadow of death claim it. May a cloud settle on it. May the blackness of the day terrify it.

As for that night, may darkness seize it. May it not be included among the days of the year. May it not come into the number of the month.

Oh, may that night be barren. May no joyful shout come into it. May those curse it who curse the day, those who are ready to arouse Leviathan.

May the stars of its morning be dark. May it look for light and have none and not see the

dawning of the day because it did not shut up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hide sorrow from my eyes. It will not be reasonable for a number of reasons.

It will not be reasonable for us to comment on every verse for one thing, because not every verse would reward comment. Some of the statements. Well, most of the poetry is impressionistic.

It's there to give an impression, to express a feeling rather than to communicate some kind of didactical teaching or information. And as a teacher, my tendency is to want to comment on every verse. But that's when you lose the sense.

This poetry is about feeling. It's not about analysis, though there are some things that we'll get that we'll miss out on if we don't understand what he's talking about. But certainly when he talks about let the day be dark, let it not be added to the calendar, you know, because that day did not shut up my mother's womb.

Reminds me of the song, the hit song back in the 60s, Monday, Monday, can't trust that day. You know, Monday, Monday, you know, why didn't you warn me that, you know, my my girlfriend was leaving me on that day as if the day was somehow responsible because something bad happened on that day. It's like it's poetic to blame the day, which everyone knows the day had no responsibility in it.

But the idea is simply to express one's anger, one's disappointment that that day ever happened. And he wishes it never did happen. He wishes that that day had closed up the doors of his mother's womb and not allowed him to come out.

This is again poetic rather than literal. He didn't want to be he didn't want his mother to have to have a rotting dead child in a room for the rest of her life. He had to come out.

He's expressing anguish and he's using impressionistic language, as all the all the speeches do. One thing that may need to be common is verse eight. He says, May those cursed who curse the day, those who are ready to arouse Leviathan.

There are several words in the Hebrew of this verse that are unclear in their meaning. And commentators have come up with quite a variety of possible renderings of it. Some feel that he's referring to conjurers.

Remember, Job lives in a pagan world and he's the only really godly man in that world. And so there are people he knows of that are conjurers, magicians and so forth. And when he talks about cursing the day, he seems to be asking those who were who were curses against things, including those who would arouse Leviathan.

That is, apparently this Leviathan was a monstrous creature that terrified ancient people because we see a description of Leviathan later on in chapter forty one. But this Leviathan apparently, since they couldn't control Leviathan with weapons and things like

that, they were magicians who tried to the word rouse there in the Hebrew might be translated tame or control. So, I mean, he's referring to people who apparently made a habit of trying to control the scary things of nature by curses and things like that.

And so he's saying, let those people, while they're at it, curse the day that I was born. If he listed among the things he wishes evil on that day for and then verse eleven, he kind of changes a little bit, says, you know, why didn't I have the privilege of dying at infancy or even in the womb? He says, why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? Why did the knees receive me or why the breasts that I should nurse for now? I would have lain still and then quiet. I would have been asleep.

That means if I had been stillborn, I would now be at rest. I wouldn't be suffering as I am now. Then I would have been at rest with the kings and counselors of the earth who built ruins for themselves.

Now, no kings ever built ruins for themselves. What he means is who built kingdoms that are now ruins, these ruins that he apparently even in his early days, they could see the ruins of earlier empires. Which empires, I don't know, maybe that of Nimrod and others before him.

But the point is, there are kings who built great empires for themselves, which now are ruins. These men who built these ruins for themselves are dead. They're in shield.

And I would be with them. I'd be in the company of important people, all of us dead, all of us unaware of each other's presence, of course, but basically then instead of being on this ash heap here. I'd be with princes who have died and gone on or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver, or why was I hidden? Like, was I not hidden like a stillborn child, like infants who never saw light there? The wicked cease from troubling and there, meaning in death, the weary are at rest there.

The prisoners rest together. They do not hear the voice of the oppressor, the small and the greater there. And the servant is free from his master.

Why is light given to him who is in misery and life to the bitter soul who long for death? But it does not come and search for it more than hidden treasures. And this is really a question that sufferers often ask, you know, why do I have to go on living? Is it really necessary? I mean, life is so painful. It'd be less painful just to to call this the end and to check out and to pull the plug and to and to stop living.

And it sometimes seems almost unfair and an additional unfairness of God that once you are miserable, then he makes you keep living longer. When you really long for death, if you've never been there and you young people, I imagine many of you have never even come close to being in that place yet. I remember when I was young, I read things like the Psalms.

They didn't mean much to me. Job didn't mean much to me. It was all theoretical.

You get old and you go through different things. And when you've been through some actual serious crisis, serious suffering, you begin to understand the sentiments and you think, you know, that's true. Why doesn't God just let you die when you say, OK, God, I'm I'm done.

But but see, that's the thing. God does. It's not our decision when we die.

That's why suicide is wrong, because God doesn't leave it up to us when we die. People who commit suicide come to the place that he's talking about here. They just go a step further than he did.

They want to die. They're miserable. They figure they can't take it any longer.

Job felt the same way, but he didn't feel like he had the liberty to take his own life. That would be intruding into God's prerogatives. And he just wonders why God doesn't do him the favor of killing him.

He longs for death as a man longs for hidden treasures who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they can find the grave. Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden and whom God has hedged in? For my sign comes before I eat and my groanings pour out like water for the thing I greatly feared has come upon me. And what I dreaded has happened to me.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet. I have no rest for trouble comes. Now, I should comment on verse 25, because some have used this as their way of trying to suggest.

Now, this explains why these things happen to Job. And especially those who have the view that if a man has enough faith, he will avoid such disasters, that there are guarantees they feel. I mean, they think exactly what Job's counselors thought, that if you do the right thing, things will go right for you.

And if you do the wrong thing, things won't go right for you. That's exactly Job's theology. That's the exact theology of the theology that's called the word of faith theology.

The difference is that they just have a different view of what things you have to do right or wrong. Probably Job's counselors were thinking, you know, the wrong thing to do is to murder and to oppress the poor and to commit adultery and do things like that. And certainly those are wrong things to do to the word of faith.

It's the wrong thing to do is to fear. The wrong thing to do is have doubt. The wrong thing to do is worry.

The wrong thing is to have lack of faith or to have negative faith, because they say if you

have positive faith, you will always be well, you will always be prosperous. And only if you sin in having negative faith do you bring these things upon you. They say that you will have what you confess.

You will have what you say. You'll have what you believe you will have. That is their doctrine.

And so when they come to the book of Job, they have very serious problems because Job is very clearly not a bad man. And yet he's experiencing all those things that the word of faith people say that we shouldn't be experiencing. And they look and they search and they comb through the book, looking for some explanation.

And they find it here. Chapter three, verse twenty five, Job says, The thing I greatly feared has come upon me. They say, Ah, we found it.

It happened to him because he feared. It happened to him because he had negative faith. Now we see that explains everything.

But you see, the purpose of the book of Job is to say not everything can be explained. There isn't always a reason. And certainly, if we say that these things came upon Job because he feared and he doesn't say that, he says the things that he feared have come upon him.

That doesn't say they came because he feared them. But God himself has said that he brought these things on Job without a cause. You remember that that's in chapter two and verse three, when the devil comes back after the first wave of trials have been brought against Job and the devil wants to have another, you know, swipe at him.

And the Lord said to Satan in chapter two or three, Have you considered my servant Job? There's not like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man and one who fears God and shuns evil, although he does have problems with his faith. God said, No, he doesn't even say that he doesn't know of anything he can say against Job. And he says, And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without cause.

These things came on Job without any cause in Job. It was simply God's choice to send these tests to him, but it was not any cause in Job. So it certainly was not the fact that he had lack of faith.

This work doesn't work more than that. If one argues that these things came on Job because he feared them and that that's the universal rule of the universe, then how come it's not true? Have you never feared something that didn't happen? I feared many things that never happened. That's why worrying is such a waste of energy and so wrong, because it doesn't really change anything.

It doesn't make bad things happen. It doesn't keep bad things from happening. Worrying is just unrelated to the actual events themselves.

And if you're worried about something and it doesn't happen, which is almost always the case, the majority of things we worry about don't end up happening. Well, then, of course, we wasted a lot of emotional energy unnecessarily. If we worry about something and it does happen, we find that worrying didn't keep it from happening.

So it was a waste of energy anyway. Worrying just doesn't make sense. And Jesus taught against worrying.

And the Bible tells us we shouldn't fear. Certainly, we shouldn't be living fearful and worried lives. But there are things that we would fear if we contemplate them.

If you contemplated all your children being killed in an accident together, would that not bring, you know, fearful images to your mind? What Job is saying is not because I feared these things, they happened, but rather the things that happened to me are not the things I would have expected or wished. They're the things that I feared, the things I least would have wanted, the things that the very thought of them would make me, you know, dread. He's simply talking about the negative quality of the things that he's experienced.

He's not trying to connect his fear with the outcome. Now, we finally get to hear from one of his friends in chapter four. And what I'm going to do, Eliphaz speaks for two chapters.

I'm going to read at least one chapter without much comment at a time, just so we can move through the material quickly enough. And then I'm going to go back and make comments where I feel like they would perhaps be helpful. Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, Remember now, whoever perished being innocent or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

By the blast of God they perish and by the breath of his anger they are consumed. The roaring of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion and the teeth of the young lions are broken. The old lion perishes for lack of prey and the cubs of the lioness are scattered.

Now, a word was secretly brought to me and my ear received a whisper of it in disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night when deep sleep falls on men. Fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones shake. Then a spirit passed before my face.

The hair on my body stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes.

There was silence. Then I heard a voice saying, Can a mortal man be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his maker? If he puts no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error, how much more those who dwell in houses of clay whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before a moth. They are broken in pieces from morning till evening.

They perish forever with no one regarding. Does not their own excellence go away? They die even without wisdom. Now, Eliphaz is not finished here, but let's just look at what he's said so far.

In the first six verses, he's essentially commending Job for his past behavior. Job had better hang on to these words because he's not going to get any more positive strokes from any of his friends after this. You know, there's a little bit of sympathy here.

Maybe a lot. I mean, who wouldn't be sympathetic toward a man in such grief? And they don't know yet that Job is going to resist their counsel. Their counsel is acknowledge that you've done something bad here so God can fix it for you.

And he's not going to acknowledge that because it isn't true. They don't know he's going to be so resistant and stubborn. And so they're obviously a little more compassionate.

When they find him unwilling to yield to their suggestions, then they get angry with him. And like I say, they never say anything positive again. In fact, Eliphaz himself in his third speech ends up denying all the things he said in these first six verses.

He says, you didn't help the poor. You exploited widows, you know, which was not true. But these guys get so exasperated they start speaking nonsense.

It's interesting because they were wise men and what they spoke sounds sensible initially. But they just kind of lose all touch with reality because they get so exasperated with Job. And they're exasperated with him because he's holding on to the truth.

And the truth does not agree with their theology. That's what exasperates them. And they care more about maintaining their theology than they care about a suffering friend.

Which I think is their primary mistake. He asks permission to speak in verse two. He says, I realize you're in a lot of grief.

Will it add any greater stress to you? Will it wear you if someone, you know, makes some suggestions to you? I want to acknowledge that you've been a very good man. You've helped a lot of people. You know, your record has been very clean.

And when other people were going through sufferings, maybe similar to yours that you're going through now, you were a strength to them. You helped them. You counseled them.

You encouraged them. But now you're experiencing these things and you're not. You're troubled and you're weary.

Now, I don't know if Eliphaz is criticizing him that he's troubled and weary from it. It almost sounds like he's saying, well, you've counseled others. Can't you take your own counsel? How come you're not doing better with this? It kind of sounds like he's saying that.

But he might not be implying anything quite so, you know, abrasive. He might just be saying, you know, you've done good to others and now you're on the receiving end of the trouble. And you know, of course, the trouble that they were in firsthand.

By implication, someone should come and comfort Job. And these friends perhaps felt like they were there to do it. When Job had known other people in trouble, he'd given them counsel.

And these men have come to... now Job is weary. Job's suffering. And so they've come to give him counsel too.

And no doubt, they intend very well. They really do think that if Job will take their counsel seriously and repent, then that'll fix it. They really want to see him relieved.

And this is actually the right approach to take in some counseling situations. Sometimes you can see immediately that a person's disasters in their marriage or in their finances or in their children's lives are the result of mistakes. Obvious mistakes.

Or moral blunders that the people have made. And you can say, now this is where the problem has come from. You know, it may not be what you want to hear, but you need to change this.

You need to repent of this. You need to go apologize to that person. You need to humble yourself.

That is the right advice in some cases. It is the right advice when it is the right advice. In other words, it's the right advice when it conforms to reality.

There are people who do things wrong and then get bad results. Eliphaz knew that. Job knew that too.

And he says so. He says, I know all these things. This isn't news.

But, he says, it's not applicable here. And for you to try to put every complex human problem into one category, into one pigeonhole and say, now, life seems manageable to me because I can make sense of things that don't make sense. Because it fits in this pigeonhole or this one fits in that pigeonhole.

Okay, now I've got all my ducks in a row. I don't have to worry about there being anything unexplainable or terrifying about life. I've got control of everything because I know how the whole system works.

And so these guys come with the idea that they're going to help Job out because they know the problem. He's a sinner. And that's what he brings up in verse 7. Who, Job, I mean, listen now.

You're an old man. You've seen a lot. You know what we know.

Do you ever know of anyone who perished being innocent? Or an upright man who was ever cut off? Now, he must mean cut off violently or cut off prematurely. Because everybody knows righteous people who die because everyone dies. Although not many righteous people around.

So maybe no one had ever seen a righteous man die because they'd never seen a righteous man. Maybe they had the theory that if a man was really righteous, he wouldn't die. And everyone we know who's ever died were arguably not righteous.

But I think more he's saying, he's not saying that righteous people never die and never perish. I think what he's saying is, like you are perishing now. In the middle of your years.

I mean, Job lived 140 years after this. So he wasn't in his old age. He might have been old compared to us.

But he still had most of his life ahead of him. It would seem. It looked like he was being cut off and perishing in the midst of his days.

That's what I think the statement implies. If you're righteous, you're not going to prematurely be brought to ruin. Of course, you'll die someday.

That's just the plight of all men. But he goes on and says, even as I have seen. In verse 8. And this is really what Eliphaz's authority is.

Now, remember, these guys can't be faulted for not using the Bible as their authority. They didn't have a Bible. There was no book of the Bible written when this story happened.

They had no Bible. They had to base their theology on observations. On cause and effect, logical, philosophical reasoning.

And so Eliphaz, unlike the others, Bildad and Zophar use different authorities they appeal to. But Eliphaz continually appeals to experience. Well, I've seen this.

I've observed this. And he says that here in chapter 4, verse 8. He says it in chapter 5,

verse 3. He says, I've seen the foolish taking root. And suddenly I curse his habitation.

And then he went downhill from there. He even had another thing he had seen. This was almost on the verge of being called a divine revelation.

A spirit appeared to Eliphaz in the night. Now, that's an interesting story. Although many people I've talked to have had spirits in the night come and visit them.

Usually demon spirits. And I don't know what the nature of this spirit was. What it said was not necessarily untrue.

But it was not necessarily true either. It depends on how it's taken. The words that this spirit said to him in the middle of the night.

Could be words you'd expect to find in one of the Psalms or one of the other parts of the Bible that are from God. But again, if he's taking this revelation the wrong way and using it to condemn Job. Then this becomes a deception.

Just like when the devil was at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And he said to Eve, if you eat this fruit, you will not die. But you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.

That's true. That happened. When she ate it, her eyes were open.

She and her husband. And they knew good and evil. Just like the devil said.

He told the truth, but he told it in order to. You know, he's telling the truth without all the facts. They, in fact, were condemned by their action.

He didn't mention that was going to happen. They became less like God in terms of personal character. He didn't say that was going to happen.

He told them some truth. But sometimes a partial truth can be the most effective way of deceiving someone. And likewise, this spirit that spoke to Eliphaz.

What it said seemed to be essentially true. But depending on when it was spoken. I wonder whether this spirit came to Eliphaz when he had heard about Job's troubles.

And was contemplating what he should say to Job. And then this spirit appeared to him and gave him these insights. If that were true, then this was just another one of the devil's interventions here in testing Job.

See, here's what we have to understand. All the physical problems that came on Job were the devil's doing. We know that because we see that God gave Satan permission.

And Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and did these things. We're not specifically told about the devil's intervention in these dialogues. But I think we have every reason to believe that that was part of the devil's testing of Job too.

Job didn't collapse under external pressure. So he comes and brings friends to falsely accuse him. To arouse his indignation at being falsely accused and so forth.

And it could be that the devil was inspiring these friends. Though they weren't well intentioned. Remember, Peter was well intentioned when he told Jesus.

You shouldn't go to the cross. And Jesus said, get behind me Satan. You savor the things of man, not the things of God.

Peter didn't mean evil. Peter didn't intend to be the mouthpiece of Satan. But the devil sneakily spoke through him.

And likewise, it's possible that the devil was using these men. To irritate and to charge Job falsely. And so this spirit could have even been a demonic spirit.

Coming to Eliphaz, giving him what seemed to be the explanation. Of why his friend Job had come into these disasters so recently. And it may be because of this revelation that Eliphaz felt confident.

That I know the answer Job. It's not just from my observations of the general way things go. Although I've seen those throughout my life too.

Eliphaz might have been the oldest of the three. It's hard to say. But it's possible they spoke in order of their age.

Which would be kind of customary. That the youngest usually would defer to the oldest person. As Elihu did.

He deferred to all of them because they were older than him. Eliphaz might have been the oldest man of the three. And he speaks from his experience.

Which was no doubt extensive. But more impressive, he speaks from a revelation. From a spirit.

But that spirit may not have been from God. And basically the spirit says things that are essentially true. That a man is not righteous.

A man cannot be more righteous than God. And the implication Eliphaz is making here. Is that therefore Job it's better not to try to pretend to be righteous.

Because if you do you're kind of trying to make yourself more righteous than God. Because God has brought this on you. And if you're saying you don't deserve it.

You're saying God's doing something unrighteous. The philosophy and the theology of these men. Is that you either have to condemn God or Job.

Because there's a contest here between God and Job. God has done something harsh to

Job. It's not a just thing.

Unless Job is guilty of something. So you either have to say Job's guilty or God's guilty. And the spirit said to Eliphaz.

Is a man more righteous than God? Can a mortal man be more righteous than his creator? In other words of course not. And therefore Job must be in the wrong. Because otherwise God's the one who's made wrong.

You can't put Job's righteousness above that of God. And chapter 5 Eliphaz continues. Call out now.

Is there anyone who will answer you? And to which of the holy ones will you turn? For wrath kills a foolish man and envy slays a simple one. I have seen. Again calling on his experience.

I have seen the foolish taking root. And suddenly I curse his habitation. His sons are far from safety.

They are crushed in the gate and there is no deliverer. Because the hungry eat up his harvest. Taking it even from the thorns.

And snare snatches their substance. For affliction does not come from dust. Nor does trouble spring from the ground.

Yet man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward. Now when he says affliction doesn't come from the dust or trouble from the ground. He's saying it's not as if affliction comes from nowhere.

It comes from somewhere. There is a cause. It doesn't just kind of spring up magically out of the ground.

Affliction comes from a series of events. Prior events. And of course by implication those prior events are the misdeeds of the afflicted person.

The prior misdeeds of the man who comes under affliction. That's the source of affliction. It doesn't just come out of nowhere.

For no reason. It doesn't just spring up out of the ground like weeds. But then he says in verse 7. Man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward.

Well as sparks fly upward is indicated axiomatic. When a fire burns it burns in an upward direction. It sparks, they fly upward.

Not another direction. So he's basically saying inevitably sparks fly upward. And therefore inevitably man is born to trouble.

Just as surely. Just as surely as that's the direction sparks in a fire go. So surely do afflictions and trouble come upon man from birth.

Now it almost sounds like this acknowledgement is a denial of what he just said. He almost seems to be saying on one hand. Well affliction doesn't just come naturally out of the ground.

And then it sounds like he's saying it does. Just like sparks fly upward. All men are born to affliction.

Almost like he's saying it's part of life. But I think what he's saying is. It may be true that affliction is inevitable for all men.

And it's the common experience of all. It's universal. But that to Eliphaz means all men are guilty of something.

Men are born guilty. Men are born evil. And therefore you know they experience suffering.

And you know what that is actually the answer that a lot of Christians give to the problem of suffering. If an unbeliever says well if there's a good God then why is there suffering? The answer Christians give usually is well men aren't good. Men are evil.

And therefore suffering is deserved. But that's not the answer the book of Job endorses. Because in this case although Job is not a perfect man.

There is no suggestion anywhere in the book of Job that Job is getting what he deserves. He's not getting what he deserves. That's the whole point.

That's the whole difference between the three friends opinion and God's opinion. Of Job. This is not what Job deserves.

And the fact that all men are sinners. And therefore all men deserve to die. And perhaps even all men deserve affliction.

There may be truth in that. But it's not applicable to this particular case. It does not help to explain these questions that are in Job's mind.

Why is this happening to me? But as for me he says I would seek God. Which by the way these guys give what would ordinarily be really good advice. If it was just applicable.

If it just was not so rigidly applied as if they know what they don't know about the situation. You see a counselor before he gives counsel ought to listen to the counselee. And as much as possible believe them.

So that one can gather the data necessary to give good counsel. I don't know if you've

ever heard Dr. Laura on the radio. I can only listen to her for about three minutes before I have to turn the channel.

And the reason is she's nasty. Now she has a lot of conservative ideas. A lot of conservative people like to listen to her because she's very confrontational and so forth.

And if someone's doing something wrong she doesn't let them get away with it. But she doesn't even wait to find out if they're doing something wrong. As soon as they call she assumes them to be guilty of something.

I've never seen it otherwise with her. Maybe very rarely. Maybe there has been an exception.

But she's a very famous psychologist on the radio that people call for advice. And she's all over the country. And she's probably the most famous one who does that in this country.

But, I mean, people will call up and they'll start to say what the problem is. And she thinks she knows it inside and out. She gives counsel which eventually when they give her more details she should be embarrassed.

Because she realizes, oops, I was assuming certain things that weren't true. She never admits she was wrong. She's wrong many times.

And the reason she's wrong is the same reason the counselor is wrong. She didn't listen. She didn't let the person tell their story yet.

She jumps to a conclusion. And, you know, you just make a fool of yourself. The Bible says in Proverbs, he that answers a matter before he hears it, it is a shame and a folly to him.

And that is really what the counselors have done wrong in this particular case too. Job's counselors were shameful. They intended well, but they didn't listen.

They thought they came already thinking they knew the answer. And if they had listened to Job, they would have heard, oh, this is different. This doesn't fit my paradigm.

But they didn't want to hear anything. They wanted to talk. They wanted to express how much they thought they knew.

And this is where they went wrong. And the counsel sounds good. And it would be good for certain circumstances.

It just didn't make sense in Job's. So he says in verse 8, as for me, I would seek God. And to God I would commit my cause.

He is a God who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. He gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields. He sets up on high those who are lowly and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

He frustrates the devices of the crafty so that their hands cannot carry out their plans. He catches the wise in their own craftiness and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them. They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noontime as in the night.

And he saves the needy from the sword, from the mouth of the mighty and from their hand. So the poor have hope and injustice shuts her mouth. Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects.

Therefore, do not despise the chastening of the almighty. For he bruises, but he binds up. He wounds, but his hands make whole.

He shall deliver you in six troubles. Yes, in seven, no evil shall touch you in famine. He shall redeem you from death in war from the power of the sword.

You should be hidden from the scourge of the tongue. You should not be afraid when destruction. Destruction, when it comes, you shall laugh at destruction and famine.

And you shall not be afraid of the beast of the earth. For you shall have a covenant with the stones of the field and the beast of the field shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is in peace.

You shall visit your habitation and find nothing amiss. You shall also know that your descendants shall be many and your offspring like the grass of the earth. You should come to the grave at a full age as a sheaf of grain ripens in its season.

Behold, this we have searched out. It is true. Hear it and know for yourself.

These are things we have all figured out from our observations. We all agree about this. You can't dispute this.

What? That if you get right with God, things will get right with you. That you need to present your cause to God. Now, Eliphaz says quite truthfully, verse nine, God does great and unsearchable things.

But Eliphaz didn't realize that what God was doing in Job's case was unsearchable, too. Eliphaz should have been humble enough to know that sometimes God does things we can't explain that don't fit into our structured philosophical assumptions. Now, he does say happy is the man whom God corrects in verse 17 and don't despise the chastening of the Almighty.

We have the same advice given to us in Proverbs and in Hebrews. And elsewhere. This is

true, but it's not applicable.

God was not correcting Job in this case. Job hadn't done something wrong that had to be corrected or he didn't have to be chastened for. This verse 19 to the end where he talks about how, you know, if you do good, then you'll be delivered out of all troubles.

You'll never die in war. You know, you'll be not hungry and famine. Nothing will destroy you.

The beast of the field will be at peace with you. That's not always true. But this guy was starting to really get on a roll here.

Basically, their point was the more happy God is with you, the fewer disasters can possibly come upon you. And if you're completely pleasing to God, then nothing can happen. Even the beast of the field will leave you alone.

Even the lions will not hurt you. Famine will come, but you won't be touched by it. Now, there are cases in the Bible of that being true.

Daniel was preserved from the lions. Isaac was made profitable and had plenty of food in the famine in his land. I mean, certainly there are cases where God intervenes for people like that.

But to make that a rule and say, well, everyone who pleases God, that will be true of them. What about those martyrs that were eaten by lions in the arenas? You know, were they unrighteous because the lions weren't their friends? Obviously, this man is going way overboard. And he might even know he is.

I mean, he might be using hyperbole. It's poetry. But the point he's making is things are not going well for you.

And therefore, you need to get right with God. And that, of course, is going to be the assumption of all of his counselors. Job's going to answer that, and his other counselors are going to speak.

But we'll take a break at this point so that we can come back fresh to the material.