

The Book of Job

Why do the innocent suffer?

Session Two: Job's Three Friends

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How did you cope when in your time of trouble your friends gave you nothing?
That was Job's experience.

Discuss or reflect on a time of personal suffering: How did your friends react? What did they do that was actually helpful? What did they do or say that made matters worse?

Three friends come to comfort Job.

1. Eliphaz is a Temanite, probably from near Edom, a place famous for its wisdom
2. Bildad is a Shuhite, from near Arabia
3. Zophar is a Naamathite, from near Arabia

They sit in silent solidarity with Job, at first.

The Book of Job poses two questions:

1. Why do the innocent suffer?
2. Does your faith depend on reward from God, the carrot and stick approach?

Starting at Chapter Four, the three friends break their silence and set out to explain the first question.

Read 4:1-9; 15:7-16; 22:1-11, 21-22.

Eliphaz speaks first and the most. He speaks three times to Job and says a few key things:

- *"Think now...where were the upright cut off?"* (4:7)
- *"Are the consolations of God too small for you...?"* (15:11)
- *"Is it gain to [God] if you make your ways blameless?"* (22:3)
- *"Is not your wickedness great?"* (22:5)
- *"Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you."* (22:21)

Eliphaz had three reasons for Job's suffering:

- Retributive (only the wicked suffer)
- Eschatological (our destiny)
- Ineffable (suffering=sin)

Job does not fear God.

Read 8:1-7; 18:1-5, 18-21, 25; 25

Bildad speaks after Eliphaz and also speaks three times to Job. He says a few key things:

- Job needs to “*seek supplication*” like an acolyte from his priest after disobedience (8:5)
- Job needs to repent
- “*They [the wicked] have no offspring...*” (18:19)
- “*How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?*” (25:4)

Bildad had three reasons for Job’s suffering:

- Disciplinary (repent, be not windy)
- Retributive (wicked shall perish)
- Incidental (mortals are unrighteous)

Read 11:1-6; 20:1-5

Zophar speaks last and only twice, although there is some speculation that a third speech from him may be contained in some of Job’s response. He says a few key things:

- Job's suffering proves his guilt
- “*God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.*” (11:6)
- Zophar's “*thoughts urge me to answer, because of the agitation within me.*” (20:2) [foreshadowing Elihu]
- “*...the exulting of the wicked is short...*” (20:5)

Zophar has two main reasons for Job’s suffering:

- Probative (suffering is the lot of evil humans)
- Revelatory (God brings the wicked down)

Job: “Miserable Comforters”

Job’s friends say Job is:

- wicked
- not God-fearing
- of no consequence

Yet God said: “[*Job is*] a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil....He still persists in his integrity.”

How do the friends’ reasons square with what God and the narrator said about Job?

Reflect on what you have said to those in trouble or has been said to you.

*How did you feel when told you were the author of your own misery and were not?
Do you think God or Satan sent the friends to be “miserable comforters” ?*