

## Lesson 2 10 August 2014

### Job's Controversy With His Friends

**Lesson Scope:** [Job 2:11-37:24](#)

#### Lesson Focus

In the previous lesson, we left Job sitting in the ashes, scraping his painful boils with a potsherd. His children were dead, and all his possessions were either destroyed or stolen. His wife advised him to "curse God, and die."

In the latter part of chapter 2, we see that Job's three friends, learning of his calamity, had come to mourn with him and comfort him. Job's physical and emotional condition was so shocking that they remained speechless seven days and seven nights.

In the dialogue that followed, each of his friends in turn gave his opinion as to why Job was suffering and how his misery might be remedied. Job and his friends were struggling with age-old questions. Why do people suffer? Why must innocent people suffer? How can a God of love allow the injustices that are rampant in a wicked world?

The problem of human suffering has been discussed many times throughout history. We should understand that God is good, and all He allows or does is good. Our inability to understand how some experiences of life work for our good should not undermine our faith in our good God.

It is right to discuss some possible reasons why God's people suffer. Although we cannot necessarily identify which reasons apply to individual cases, it will be profitable to consider this aspect of the lesson in a general way.

Human suffering does not necessarily indicate personal guilt but may result from conflicts in the spirit world. In these conflicts God works out His higher purposes for His glory and man's good.

**Lesson Aim:** To promote a right view of human suffering.

**Theme Verse:** [Job 23:10](#). But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

## Lesson Text

### Eliphaz Accuses Job

Job 4:1 <sup>1</sup> Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said,

Job 4:7-8 <sup>7</sup> Remember, I pray thee, who *ever* perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? <sup>8</sup> Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

Job 6:1-2 <sup>1</sup> But Job answered and said, <sup>2</sup> Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together!

Job 6:11 <sup>11</sup> What *is* my strength, that I should hope? and what *is* mine end, that I should prolong my life?

Job 22:1 <sup>1</sup> Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said,

Job 22:23-24 <sup>23</sup> If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. <sup>24</sup> Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the *gold* of Ophir as the stones of the brooks.

### Bildad Exhorts Job

Job 8:1-3 <sup>1</sup> Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, <sup>2</sup> How long wilt thou speak these *things*? and *how long shall* the words of thy mouth *be like* a strong wind? <sup>3</sup> Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?

Job 8:8 <sup>8</sup> For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers:

Job 8:13 <sup>13</sup> So *are* the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish:

Job 9:1-2 <sup>1</sup> Then Job answered and said, <sup>2</sup> I know *it is* so of a truth: but how should man be just with God?

Job 9:10-12 <sup>10</sup> Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number. <sup>11</sup> Lo, he goeth by me, and I see *him* not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not. <sup>12</sup> Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?

Job 10:12-13 <sup>12</sup> Thou hast granted me life and favour, and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit. <sup>13</sup> And these *things* hast thou hid in thine heart: I know that this *is* with thee.

### Zophar Judges Job

Job 11:1 <sup>1</sup> Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said,

Job 11:6 <sup>6</sup> And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that *they are* double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee *less* than thine iniquity *deserveth*.

**Job 20:4-5** <sup>4</sup> Knowest thou *not* this of old, since man was placed upon earth, <sup>5</sup> That the triumphing of the wicked *is* short, and the joy of the hypocrite *but* for a moment?

**Job 21:1-7** <sup>1</sup> But Job answered and said, <sup>2</sup> Hear diligently my speech, and let this be your consolations. <sup>3</sup> Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on. <sup>4</sup> As for me, *is* my complaint to man? and if *it were so*, why should not my spirit be troubled? <sup>5</sup> Mark me, and be astonished, and lay *your* hand upon *your* mouth. <sup>6</sup> Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh. <sup>7</sup> Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?

**Job 21:13** <sup>13</sup> They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.

### **Elihu Justifies God**

**Job 34:1** <sup>1</sup> Furthermore Elihu answered and said,

**Job 34:10** <sup>10</sup> Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, *that he should do* wickedness; and *from* the Almighty, *that he should commit* iniquity.

**Job 34:21-23** <sup>21</sup> For his eyes *are* upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. <sup>22</sup> *There is* no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. <sup>23</sup> For he will not lay upon man more *than right*; that he should enter into judgment with God.

**Job 34:31-32** <sup>31</sup> Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne *chastisement*, I will not offend *any more*: <sup>32</sup> *That which* I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.

**Job 37:23-24** <sup>23</sup> *Touching* the Almighty, we cannot find him out: *he is* excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. <sup>24</sup> Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any *that are* wise of heart.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Eliphaz Accuses Job**

1. What was wrong with the reasoning of Eliphaz?
2. What is wrong with the modem health-and-wealth gospel?

#### **Bildad Exhorts Job**

3. Give the answers to Bildad's questions in Job 8:3.
4. What are some helps for the suffering to remain strong in their faith toward God?

## **Zophar Judges Job**

5. Why were Zophar's words unsettling to Job?

6. What blessings can the Christian experience even in a time of suffering?

## **Elihu Justifies God**

7. What response to God did Elihu recommend?

8. What are some lessons man can learn through suffering that he might not learn otherwise?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

Job's three friends arrived on the scene of Job's grief (end of chapter 2), and Job spoke from the depths of his suffering (chapter 3). Beginning with chapter 4 and ending with chapter 31, Job's three friends gave their speeches and Job answered.

Eliphaz and Bildad each spoke three times and Zophar spoke twice. Their follow-up speeches increased in severity against Job. Elihu, a younger man, spoke later (chapters 32 & 37). Even though the speeches of Job's three friends indicate that they were not devoid of truth, they frequently misapplied the truth to Job's situation.

The following statements summarize what each of Job's friends and Elihu said to Job:

Eliphaz: "Job, you are suffering. It must be that you have sinned. Receive the Lord's chastening, and He will bless you with prosperity again."

Bildad: "If you were perfect, God would not treat you like this." Zophar: "You are not as good as you think you are."

Elihu: "You justify yourself rather than God."

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Eliphaz Accuses Job**

1. The law of sowing and reaping is a general principle, not a basis for passing judgment upon individuals (Job 4:7-8; 22:23-24). Eliphaz concluded that because Job was experiencing adversity, he must have been involved with iniquity and wickedness. We know that this was not true, because God had declared to Satan that Job was perfect and upright, and that he feared God and eschewed evil.

We do well to search our lives when we experience adversity, but if we find nothing amiss, we can rest in our relationship with God. Some-

times adversity can be for the purpose of refining the Christian and drawing him to a greater dependence upon God. We do well to remember this when relating to those who are suffering.

2. Suffering drains spiritual energy and tempts one to question his purpose for living (Job 6:2, 11). Job's desire for God to cut him off (Job 6:8-9) expresses his despair in his extreme suffering. At a point like this, one's faith must continue to grasp God's promises for strength to go on. "For [God] knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14).

### **Bildad Exhorts Job**

3. God is perfect, and He requires perfection in His people, but we should not suppose that all who suffer have displeased Him (Job 8:3, 8, 13). Bildad's implication that Job was a hypocrite was groundless. And we should not conclude that the righteous never suffer or that hypocrites always have life easy. In the search for answers through times of difficulty, we must remember that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).

4. As the suffering person compares himself with the holy God, he understands the impossibility of attaining perfection by his own efforts (Job 9:2). Bildad implied that Job was not a perfect man but an evildoer (Job 8:20). Job acknowledged his imperfection but questioned how a mortal man should be just before a holy God.

Only the Scriptures can answer this question for us. In any time of suffering, we need to renew our commitment to trust God's grace to enable us to live blamelessly before Him.

### **Zophar Judges Job**

5. God does treat us better than we deserve, so we should remember that He does not enjoy seeing people suffer (Job 11:6). We will never fully understand in this life God's purposes for allowing suffering. We do know that suffering can bring people to the end of themselves and cause them to cast themselves upon the help of God. God does not work primarily to save people from suffering but to save them from sin.

6. The suffering person is troubled with questions regarding God's justice (Job 21:4, 7, 13). At times we may think that the wicked have life easy with very few problems. We must remember that the inner struggles and their lack of peace with God are not always readily evident. We need to consider their end as the psalmist did (see Psalm 73).

## **Elihu Justifies God**

7. God's dealings with man align with His wisdom and perfection (Job 34:10, 21-23). When we come to a point where we do not understand God's working, we should always begin with that which we do understand about God. We know that He is all-wise and perfect. Therefore, we know that everything He does or allows is consistent with these attributes. This knowledge can be a real comfort to us in suffering or a way of helping others who are suffering.

8. Man can learn lessons through suffering that he would not have learned otherwise (Job 34:31-32). The writer of Psalm 119:67 said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." Sometimes when everything goes smoothly in life, we may tend to become self-sufficient and forget that we are dependent upon God for everything, even life itself. The daily grace of God becomes more real to us when we come to a point of utter dependence upon Him. God told Paul concerning his thorn in the flesh, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

9. God's ways are beyond man's ability to understand (Job 37:23). Job's inability to understand the cause of his suffering did not lower his view of God. He acknowledged God's power and active involvement in his life. Paul, who experienced much suffering and difficulty, affirmed his confidence in God when he asked the question "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

## **Important Teachings**

1. The law of sowing and reaping is a general principle, not a basis for passing judgment upon individuals (Job 4:7, 8; 22:23-24).

2. Suffering drains spiritual energy and tempts one to question his purpose for living (Job 6:2, 11).

3. God is perfect, and He requires perfection in His people, but we should not suppose that all who suffer have displeased Him (Job 8:3, 8, 13).

4. As the suffering person compares himself with the holy God, he understands the impossibility of attaining perfection by his own efforts (Job 9:2).

5. God does treat us better than we deserve, so we should remember that He does not enjoy seeing people suffer (Job 11:6).

6. The suffering person is troubled with questions regarding God's jus-

tice (Job 21:4, 7, 13).

7. God's dealings with man align with His wisdom and perfection (Job 34:10, 21-23).

8. Man can learn lessons through suffering that he would not have learned otherwise (Job 34:31-32).

9. God's ways are beyond man's ability to understand (Job 37:23).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. What was wrong with the reasoning of Eliphaz?

Eliphaz focused on the law of sowing and reaping. That Job was reaping trouble seemed to prove that he must have sown iniquity and wickedness. He advised Job to turn from his sin so that everything would be all right. Eliphaz failed to consider that all people experience trouble to a greater or lesser extent. Suffering does not necessarily coincide with personal sin.

2. What is wrong with the modern health-and-wealth gospel?

God did promise material blessings to Israel, but He has not given this promise to New Testament believers. The theory that if you will come to Christ, God will bless your life with health, riches, and fame is not supported with Scripture. Those who believe this become bewildered when God allows adversity.

3. Give the answers to Bildad's questions in Job 8:3.

The answer to both questions is no. Because man's understanding and knowledge are so limited, God's activity in his life sometimes seems irrational. The fact is that God's thoughts are far above ours, and His knowledge is unlimited. He is working out what is best even when we do not understand.

4. What are some helps for the suffering to remain strong in their faith toward God?

The suffering should remember that God is good, and all He does is good. They should remember that God does not enjoy seeing people suffer. Remembering the many promises to the suffering that God has given in His Word will also help them remain strong in faith.

5. Why were Zophar's words unsettling to Job?

Zophar implied that Job was a hypocrite, who deserved even greater suffering. Job was truly a man of integrity, but circumstances seemed to verify Zophar's conclusion.

6. What blessings can the Christian experience even in a time of suffer-

ing?

In suffering the Christian can maintain a right relationship with God. The grace of God will enable him to endure suffering. He can have the support of the brotherhood and enjoy personal communion with God.

7. What response to God did Elihu recommend?

In light of God's righteousness and omniscience, man should trust Him to do what is right (Job 34:10, 21-23). If God chastises, man should receive it and learn from it (34:31). Man should have a teachable spirit (Job 34:32).

8. What are some lessons man can learn through suffering that he might not learn otherwise?

Suffering can help us to develop patience and to wait upon the Lord (James 1:2-4). Suffering can also help us become less independent and more dependent upon God and the brotherhood. Suffering can also help increase our love and commitment to God as we understand that He is working in love with us, even when we suffer.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

Even though we often do not understand God's purposes in our own or others' suffering, we know that God is in perfect control. We also know that He always works for the good of His saints. May we go forth in confidence, knowing that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

### **Research Guide**

1. Read and study such Scriptures as Hebrews 12:5-13 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 to discover some reasons why Christians suffer.
2. Read the articles "Why Does God Allow It?" in the February and March, 1990, issues of the Eastern Mennonite Testimony.