

OUR QUESTIONS: SESSION TWO

A Study of the Book of Job

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and eternal God, we adore You. Holy, holy, holy are You, Lord God Almighty; heaven and earth are full of Your glory. You created us in Your own image. Deliver us from sin and error, from the frailties of the flesh, the allurements of this present age and the temptations of the devil. Give us confidence in You that never wavers, patience that does not grow weary and courage always to be ready to confess Your goodness through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Study

Overview: Today, we will look briefly at the answers that Job's friends offer to the question of why Job is suffering. Much of the book of Job (chapters 3–37) is discourse between Job and his friends. We will only consider this section of the book quickly. The reason for this is that Job's friends do not have the correct answer. While these friends say things that sometimes sound right, their answers do not withstand the judgment.

1. The first of these friends is Eliphaz. What does he suggest is the reason for Job's suffering (Job 4:5–8)? Does this initially seem to match up to New Testament teaching (Rom. 3:10–11)?

Eliphaz claims that only those who sow iniquity and trouble reap the same. He therefore claims that Job must have done something to deserve his suffering. Indeed, God's Word in Romans 3 teaches that there is no one righteous other than Jesus, not even Job. So it could be understood that Job is suffering because of sin in a general sense. People do suffer in this world because of the consequences of the fall into sin (Gen. 3). But the case that Eliphaz is making is that Job is suffering in this particular way because of a particular sin. Job makes clear that he knows of no such particular sin, and God affirms this truth in His conversations with the devil. Therefore, this answer does not satisfy Job's "why?" question, and neither does it satisfy anyone suffering in our day. Sin and suffering simply do not sit together as cause-and-effect companions.

2. The second of these friends is Bildad. What does he suggest Job should do if he seeks relief from his troubles (Job 8:2–7)?

Bildad encourages Job to plead with or pray to God. It should be noted that Bildad claims God will help Job if Job is truly righteous. Bildad teaches that one who can stand up to the judgment of their own accord will be helped and blessed by the Lord. While Job is a blameless man, even he cannot stand before the judgment of the Lord. So again, this is not the answer to the question of "why?"

3. The third of these friends is Zophar. He seems to suggest not only that Job suffers rightly, but that he is worthy of much more suffering. What insults does Zophar add to Job's injury, and what does he suggest Job do (Job 11:11–16)?

Zophar claims that the Lord has allowed Job to suffer because He has seen Job's worthlessness, iniquity and stupidity. He tells Job to remove his iniquity. He speaks as if Job is able to do this himself, but that is not how forgiveness works. One cannot grant their own forgiveness. Consider that God is the one who removes the sin of all, as seen in the case of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5–7).

4. Finally, in chapter 32, a young man named Elihu speaks. His answers are much wiser and more helpful. What does Elihu say about the words the other three friends have spoken (Job 32:12–15)?

The young Elihu says that none of Job's older friends has spoken with wisdom. He declares that wisdom only comes from the Lord. The words of Job's friends gave no answer to Job.

5. Elihu then begins to address Job directly. What is the first point Elihu makes about the relationship of God to man (Job 33:12–14; 42:3)? Notice how God makes this point also in the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Elihu rebukes Job for demanding that God answer. He declares that God is greater than man. God gives His answer; however, humans may not perceive it. God's ways are, in fact, higher and better than our ways.

6. What does Elihu suggest is God's aim in everything that happens under the sun (Job 33:26, 28–30)?

God works to redeem His people. Elihu says repeatedly that God works in this way. The Lord seeks to raise a person's soul from the pit and give that person the light of life.

7. In Job 34, Elihu asserts that God is absolutely just in whatever He does. What truth about God makes it so that His ways are not judged right, but simply are just (Job 34:13–15)?

The world belongs to God from the very beginning. In addition to this, everything that exists depends upon God. There is no standard above Him to prove Him just. He is the standard.

8. Is God unaware of those who do evil (Job 34:21–22)?

No. God sees the ways of all people, without exception.

9. Who is the judge, and who are the judged, according to Elihu? What is Job's fault (Job 34:31–37)? Is that what his other friends were accusing him of?

For much of the book of Job it seems as if Job wants to be the judge and put God on trial. Elihu declares that God cannot be judged. He is the Judge, and He judges Job and all people. While the Lord declares that Job does not sin, like his three friends, Job is mistaken in trying to take the judgment throne for himself. God cannot be put on trial. He is the Judge. He is the Creator of all things, and all things depend upon Him. So how could God be judged? This is a very important concept to a study of the book of Job. Humility before God is key.

10. In Job 35, Elihu condemns Job outright for his words. What does he say about Job's claim that God is remaining hidden from him (Job 35:13–14)?

God will not regard Job's empty words. He cannot be put on trial. Here we should note that while we certainly don't want to

be harsh and unloving to those who suffer, sometimes people who are suffering will try to accuse God and demand things from Him, which creatures cannot do to their Creator.

11. In Job 36–37, Elihu extols God's greatness and majesty. What characteristic of God makes him so praiseworthy (Job 36:24–26)?

Elihu praises God's work — specifically His work of creation. He also praises God's greatness when considering His span of life.

12. What work of God does Elihu use as one example of how God accomplishes things in ways we will never totally understand (Job 36:27–33)?

Elihu speaks of the Lord providing rain as something to marvel at. He not only mentions the provision of the rain, but also the power of the storm. It should be noted here that in our contemporary setting, Elihu's talk is foreign to us. Through the study of science, we often try to explain everything. While people have learned quite a bit through science over the years and centuries, there is something mysterious and miraculous about storms and rain that we don't readily consider. We would do well to reflect upon what Elihu is saying and apply that to God's work in other areas as well.

13. What does Elihu therefore conclude about how men should approach God (Job 37:24)?

People should approach the Lord in fear rather than pride or conceit. Please note that time and again in God's Word, "the fear of the Lord" is commended to us. It is, as we are taught in Psalm 111:10 and elsewhere, the beginning of wisdom.

14. While Job's first three friends are sure that God must be punishing Job for some specific sin in his life, Elihu contends that the real problem is that Job has forgotten his place and has sought to judge God rather than be judged by Him. Do we sometimes display the same arrogance?

Certainly, we do this because of our sin. In fact, this sin is prevalent in our context. It can be especially problematic in a discussion on why suffering exists. We must be careful of this. Yet this is not the last thing to say about suffering. God has done something to address the problem of suffering. That will be considered in Session 4. In the next session, God will address Job's questions with some of His own.

CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful God and Father, remember us all in our sorrow and grief. Support us when we are unable to understand the things that happen to us and those we love. Comfort and console us, and grant that through Your merciful help we may have courage to face the days ahead; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.