

ELIPHAZ' FIRST SPEECH PART 1 (Job 4)

CBC-12 Feb 2012

3 cycles (J 4-14, 15-21, 22-31): Eliphaz (E), Bildad (B), Zophar (Z), Job (J).

Interpreters face a real dilemma. All Scripture is God's Word → truth (John 17.17). But not every sentiment expressed is true (e.g., 1.11). The *report* is true. The book of J is a truthful report and it testifies that some of what J's friends said is not right (42.7). And J himself admits he had spoken foolishly (42.3) and hated himself for it (42.6). So how are we supposed to judge the sentiments expressed in these speeches? Let me suggest:

1) JEBZ all spoke prophetically (2 Pet 1.20-21). "Prophecy" is not necessarily predictive but denotes God himself speaking through men. There really is only one Author [Source] of Scripture; men were merely writers of Scripture. We must handle every word of the book of J with reverence.

2) Much of what JEBZ uttered is truthful sentiment in all respects. Let us beware of exaggerating the interpretive challenge and thus failing to appreciate this grand revelation of God's nature and ways with men.

3) Some is truth but poorly or wrongly applied to J. Matthew Henry wrote, "Never was any doctrine better explained, or worse applied, than this by Z, who intended by all this to prove J a hypocrite. Let us receive the good explication, and make a better application, for warning to ourselves to stand in awe and not to sin" (on J 20.29). This is an excellent observation about the speeches generally. I am not aware of anything they said that cannot be understood with the best possible construction as truth—an amazing attribute of these speeches in J. But their implications can possess a measure of irreverence toward God (in J's case) and uncharitable judgment against J (in the case of EBZ).

4) We must rely on the "analogy of faith," a.k.a. the "rule of faith." Rooted in Rom 12.6, "let us prophesy according to the proportion [analogy] of [the] faith," which has been interpreted to mean consistency with the body of revealed Christian doctrine; i.e., all else Scripture says. The hermeneutical principle is sound and necessary. It follows from the fact that one infallible Author produced the whole Bible and it is internally consistent.

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which are not many, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly (1689 LBCF 1.9).

As the Spirit guides us by the rule of Scripture, we can interpret soundly, if not with absolute perfection. You must remember and apply Acts 17.11.

E from Teman, renown for wisdom (Jer 49.7), speaks first, perhaps as the oldest among J's friends (15.10; 32.6-7), and his basic point (J 4-5) seems to be, "J, God is chastening you for your sins and if you will just repent, all will be well at last" (cf. 5.8, 26).

Now what of this? Not J's sins but, ironically, his righteousness, provoked his calamities (J 1-2). Still, J was not sinless, and God was using the trial to refine him further (23.10). So E is basically wrong in his analysis, and yet he is basically right that J ought to make the best use of such trials to examine himself, repent of all sin, and draw near to God.

Allow a pointed observation. J was exceptionally righteous, even above other godly people (1.8). Reality and humility conspire to keep any of us from thinking the like could be said of us. If there was some measure validity in E's counsel even to J, how much more to you and me? Where J's friends are too harsh in their attempts to convict him, the indictments probably have a closer application to ourselves, so let us receive them more with more gratitude and respond accordingly (5.17).

Eliphaz Answered (v. 1)

After a week of silence, J spoke first (J 3), lamenting his plight. It was courteous for his friends to let him speak first, and they also properly let him have the last word repeatedly (E/J, B/J, Z/J, etc.), since he was the wisest, most afflicted, and most esteemed among them. Now E considers it his turn.

HERE IS THE PROBLEM (4.2-5)

First, a problem of counseling.

You Are Impatient and Provocative (v. 2)

"If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient?" (ESV). The adjective could also be "offended," and the Heb. original has the sense of a "burden." E realizes that his words might further irritate J but speaks anyway.

"Yet who can keep from speaking?" (ESV). E is about to burst. If E had consoling words they would have been welcome. "J, God is good and wise, and whatever you're suffering now, you can trust him, even though we cannot understand his ways. He will prove faithful to you at last," etc. But that is not what he had in mind at all.

You Have Counseled Well in the Past (vv. 3-4)

Four statements recognize J's good advice to sufferers: one literal (instructing/discipling them), three figurative (strengthened weak hands and feeble knees, cf. Heb 12.12; thus "upholding" him that was falling). He supported others by godly counseling—what love and wisdom require.

We need to appreciate the dire need of all suffering souls for godly counsel like this, and its indispensability as a means of grace and strength. Let us see true, biblical counseling restored as a basic ministry of the church, carried on at least informally by all who know the Lord and his Word (Rom 15.4).

But instead of real appreciation, this is merely E's setup for caustic criticism.

You Are Not Practicing What You Preach (v. 5)

E minimizes J's calamity ("it") and makes him out to be an immediate basketcase ("it touches you," cf. 1.20-22 and 2.10). It is easy to think we would do better. "Don't judge any man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins" (Indian proverb). E lacks sufficient sympathy. He probably judged J's lament (J 3) as whining, expecting him to "snap out of it," etc.

E subtly insinuates that J did not really believe his own counsel, and thus was hypocritical—essentially the same charge Satan made (1.9).

ARE YOU REALLY RIGHTEOUS AFTER ALL? (4.6-11)

Cuts closer to the basic problem as E sees it: *J is not really righteous.*

Like J's wife, E becomes an instrument of Satan, seducing J to question his own fundamental integrity—an insidious thing, since J was really righteous. Similar to Christ's temptation ("If thou be the Son of God," Matt 4.4). E: "If you are such a great man of God, where is your confidence? If God loves you more than others, why are you suffering so?" See how near this is to "curse God and die!" (J's wife). The truly humble like J are vulnerable to these kinds of thoughts, corrosive to their assurance and joy.

Counselors must not demoralize God's children when convicting them of sin.

You Don't Seem to Believe in Yourself Now (v. 6)

AV difficult, but MH interprets, "Does it not all (i.e. your piety, your faith, your hope, your supposed integrity) appear now to be a mere pretence? For, had you been sincere in it, God would not have thus afflicted you."

Or, "Is not your piety your confidence, / Your integrity your hope?" (Tanakh). There is a fine line between encouragement from evidences and trusting in oneself. E seems sarcastic. "When you were doing well you thought you were such a good person, but now, where is your boast?" Again, like the taunts against Christ upon the cross (Matt 27.40).

Remember You Reap What You Sow (vv. 7-9)

E starts with two rhetorical questions implying that no innocent/upright person ever perished/was cut off—and by inference that J, suffering so, must not be innocent/upright. Now while in the long run E's doctrine is true (the truly righteous will finally be saved), it is not true in the short run. Godly people are subject to sudden bereavement, poverty, sickness, just as others. E's short-sightedness causes him to err greatly in judging J.

"Even as I have seen," an appeal to experience as the basis for doctrine—never safe for several reasons: 1) providence is not self-interpreting, 2) our reasoning is limited and fallible, 3) we haven't seen all cases nor the end of them. E had NOT EVER seen the whole picture (the heavenly dialogue).

So vv. 8-9 prove ultimately true (cf. Gal 6.7-9), but not until Judgment Day, and not without taking Christ into account for the saved, who suffered for their sins. E's doctrine is like karma, one of the basic ideas of all Indian

religions: "what goes around comes around," a strict law of cause and effect that basically undermines God's sovereign prerogative to show mercy. E's idea is too temporal and reductionistic—like popular thinking today.

Even the Greatest Tyrants Get Theirs (vv. 10-11)

The literal demise of "the king of the jungle" fittingly symbolizes the final ruin of oppressive, wealthy rulers. E may be suggesting J is the dying lion.

I HAD A VISION (4.12-16)

E turns from the alleged authority of his own observation to his own personal vision/revelation, supposedly from God.

My Vision Is Authoritative

This was more impressive in those days of revelatory visions but not today. "The Holy Scriptures [are] most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased" (1689 LBCF I.1).

Was E's vision an authentic revelation from God? There seems no good reason to doubt that it was, as such was possible and its content was true.

My Vision Is Important

Six attention-getting traits: 1) esoteric, v 12; 2) mystery of a dream, v. 13; 3) awe-inspiring, v. 14; 4) a spirit-messenger, v. 15; 5) obscure figure, v. 16a; 6) prelude of dramatic silence, v. 16b.

GOD IS SUPREME RIGHTEOUS (4.17-21)

The doctrine is true, but poorly applied to J's immediate situation.

Can a Man Be More Righteous Than God? (v. 17)

To ask the question is to answer it, but E continues either relating his vision or elaborating upon it in vv. 18-21. The relevance is that E wrongly interprets J to justify himself and condemn God. Whatever God does to man must be justified, and none of man's accusations against God could possibly stand.

God Is Greater than Glorious Angels (v. 18)

Servants=angels by parallelism. Some of the angels fell from original righteousness, and none continue righteous without God's enabling. In comparison with God, the most wise, glorious angels are foolish and dark. Their wisdom and glory is not inherent but derived, reflected.

God Is Much Greater than Man, Earthly and Mortal (vv. 19-21)

Angels dwell above, heavenly; men below, earthly. Angels are pure spirits, men are physical. Angels are mighty; men are weak. Angels never die; men vulnerable, mortal, ephemeral, and foolish. It is unthinkable that J's complaints are fully justified and that God had wronged him in any way.

Let us commit to glorify God whatever he does, whatever we or others suffer. Let us also avoid harsh judgments of suffering people, whether ourselves or others. You needn't conclude you are a hypocrite just because of trouble.