

THE THIRD DEBATE

We are studying the Book of Job as a seven-act play. We will study selective passages from each of the following seven Acts.

- Act 1 – Spiritual Testing of Undeserved Suffering (Job 1-2)
- Act 2 – Suffering for Christ (Job 3)
- Act 3 – First Debate of Suffering (Job 4_14)
- Act 4 – Second Debate of Suffering (Job 15-21)
- Act 5 – Third Debate of Suffering (Job 22-31)**
- Act 6 – Special Speeches on Suffering (Job 32-41)
- Act 7 – Spiritual Restoration from Suffering (Job 42)

In Act 3, The first debate, Job's three friends argued that Job's suffering was the result of divine discipline for some unconfessed sin (Job 5:17). The assumption was that God wouldn't do this to His child except for divine discipline (Heb.12: 5-11).

In Act 4, The second debate, Job's three friends argue that if Job's suffering is not due to divine discipline than it must be that he is an unbeliever or living like an unbeliever (Job 15:20). Their assumption is that God wouldn't do this to a blameless, upright, God fearing, evil shunning believer (Job 18/ Bildad).

Throughout the two debates Job has maintained that although he is not sinless, he is innocent of these charges (Job 19:25-27).

Now in Act 5, The third debate, Zophar will not speak at all and Eliphaz (ch.22) and Bildad (ch.25) speak very briefly. In fact, Bildad's discourse is the shortest and Job's response is the longest (chs.26-31).

"The third cycle of speeches, unlike the first (chs. 4-14) and the second (chs. 15-21), is truncated and abbreviated. Bildad speech is very brief (25:1-6), and Zophar does not speak at all. The dialogue between Job and his friends comes to an end because the friends cannot acknowledge what is not true." (NIV, 22:1-26:14)

This lesson will study four aspects of Act 5, The Third Debate.
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1. We mentioned how Eliphaz's disposition changed in Act 4 from diplomacy to harsh. In Act 5, he became cruel to Job (ch.22).

"In his earlier speeches, Eliphaz was the least caustic and at first even offered consolation (4:6-5:17). But despite what he said in 4:3-4, Eliphaz now reprimands Job for gross social sins against the needy, who are naked and hungry (vv.6-7), and against widows and the fatherless (v.9). The only proof Eliphaz has for Job's alleged wickedness is his present suffering (vv.10-11). In ch.29 Job emphatically denies the kind of behavior of which Eliphaz accuses him." (NIV, 22:5-11)

"Eliphaz finally appears to support the argument of Bildad and Zophar, who were fully convinced that Job was a wicked man. Eliphaz makes a severe accusation: Job follows the path of the ungodly (v.15), who defy God's power and say, 'What can the Almighty do to us?' (V.17 see vv.13-14). They even have contempt for God's goodness (v.18)." (NIV, 22:12-20)

In Act 5, Eliphaz gives his final opinion on Job's suffering (ch.22).

"Eliphaz makes one last attempt to reach Job. In many ways it is a commendable call to repentance: submit to God (v.21), lay up God's words in your heart (v.22), return to the Almighty and forsake wickedness (v.23), find your delight in God rather than in gold (vv.24-26), pray and obey (v.27) and become concerned about sinners (vv.29-30). But Eliphaz's advice assumes (1) that Job is a very wicked man and (2) that Job's major concern is the return of his prosperity (v.21). Job had already made it clear in 19:25-27 that he deeply yearned to see God and be his friend." (NIV, 22:21-30)

2. Job's response is that he is confident that if God gives him a hearing, he will be vindicated (chs.23-24).

Job declares that he is bitter towards his unjust suffering and desires a hearing (23:1-7).

Job believes that God is testing him for some reason (23:8-12). [Peter discussed this point in 1 Pet.1: 6-9.]

Job has become terrified of God because of his suffering (23:13-17).

In 24:1-25, Job describes the many injustices that occur in society and wonders why God doesn't intervene (vs.1, 12). This fact disproves the friends argument of suffering of the innocent – "If this is not so, who can prove me false and reduce my words to nothing?" (24:25).

3. Bildad compares man's status to God's status – "Dominion and awe belong to God" and "How much less man, who is only a maggot – a son of man, who is only a worm." (25:1, 6).

Job's response to Bildad in chapter 26 (you is singular) and resumes his argument before all his friends and God in (chs.27-31). "With biting sarcasm, Job responds to Bildad alone (the Hebrew for the words 'you' and 'your' in these verses is singular rather than plural), indicating that Eliphaz and Zophar have already been silenced." (NIV, 26:2-4)

Job 27:1 shows Job's argument back to God and the friends – "And Job continued his discourse."

It is Job's final appeal of innocence (27:1-6). In chapter 27, Job agrees with them about the fate of the wicked but argues that he does not belong in this category (27:13-23 is a poem).

Job 28 is written to address "where can wisdom be found?" (28:12, 20). The answer for Job is – "God understands the way to it and He alone knows where it dwells." (28:23) (*Read 28:23-28; Prov.8: 22-31*)

4. Job's argument in 29:1-31:40 is "like a lawyer submitting his final brief, Job presents a three part summation.

Part one (ch.29) is a nostalgic review of his former happiness, wealth and honor; part two (ch.30) is a lament over the loss of everything, especially his honor; part three (ch.31) is a final protestation of his innocence." (NIV, 29:1-31:40)

"Job 31 is a negative in the sense that Job denies all the sins listed, but it has the positive purpose of attesting loyalty to God as His sovereign Lord. In the strongest legal terms, using a series of self-maledictory oaths, Job completes his defense." (NIV, 31:1-40)

"Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense – let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put His indictment in writing." (31:35)

At the conclusion of chapter 31, Job signs his name to it – "The words of Job are ended." (31:40)