

What Were Job's Friends Like?

In the first two chapters of Job there is a narrative account of what has happened to Job. In chapters three through thirty-one, there is an account of the speeches made by Job and his three friends.

In chapter three, there is a response to the testing of Job by Job himself. He curses the day of his birth and wishes that day would perish, that it would be darkness, and that there would be no rejoicing among the days of the year. Job feels it would have been better if he had died before he was born, or in childbirth, or when he was young. At least, that way, he would have been at rest. For Job, that kind of death would have been a way to escape.

It is at this point that his three friends come on the scene. As it turns out, these friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are no help to him at all. Their charges were false, their theology was wrong, and they did not help him physically. But, let me hasten to say, they did come! They were shocked that this powerful man had lost all, and they were hurt at his plight, and really did not know what to say. At one point Job indicated that their silence would be more comfort than their words (13:3).

Each one of these friends speak to Job, and Job answers after each one speaks. Eliphaz rebukes Job with severity, and points out that one reaps what he sows. He thinks Job is a willful sinner and that is why he is being punished (4:1-8). Job answers that he does not know why God has dealt with him in this way, and wants God to go ahead and take his life. He wonders why he has not had the spiritual and emotional aid from his friends that one would expect. He challenges them to show wherein he has done wrong (6,7)

Bildad speaks next. He thinks of himself as a philosopher, and rushes in to attack Job. He wants to know how long Job is going to continue these complaints against God. He says sin is what brings wrath upon man, and since Job is experiencing the wrath of God, he must have sinned (8) Job's response is that God is just, wise, strong, can remove mountains, shakes the earth, controls the sun, and stars, etc., and no one can analyze him or question him. It is futile to argue with God, so the only thing one can do is plead for mercy. Job believes God is doing this without cause, and he longs for death (9,10).

Zophar speaks last, and denies that Job is clean in God's eyes. He argues that God knows false men and sees iniquity and wants Job to repent. He even lists the blessings that he thinks Job would receive if he would repent (11). Job's reply

involves giving these men a tongue lashing. He repudiates their self-assumed wisdom, and extols the wisdom of God. Job had rather make his case to God than his three friends, and challenges God to meet him in court (12-14). This cycle of speeches is repeated three times.

The Theology of the “Friends” of Job

In connection with the recorded speeches and Job’s answers, I discuss the following theological perspectives which indicate what Job’s friends were like:

In 4:7,8, Eliphaz expresses the true idea that those who plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, will reap the same (Cf. Gal. 6:7). The problem here is not in the principle expressed by Eliphaz, but in his application. He assumes that Job has wilfully done some awful, wicked thing, and that is what has brought him his trouble. He also assumes that God expresses his anger NOW.

In 8:2-7, Bildad expresses the idea that if bad things happen to you, then you must have sinned. This is very bad theology. Bildad assumes that all bad things are the result of sin, so Job’s trouble is the result of sin. This is a popular false religious claim made today. What about little children who have terrible sicknesses and who die, but who are too young to sin? There is no scripture that teaches that illness is always the result of sin. We all know of sinful lifestyles that cause sickness (alcohol, tobacco, drugs, immorality), but the very best life will not end human suffering. It is true, as in the case of Job, that God tests people, and even disciplines those he loves, but it is not true that every time someone suffers, it is because of the discipline of God.

In 11:13,14, Zophar indicates correctly that if iniquity is in your hand, put it far away. He is correct about the need for repentance. His mistake is in making application to Job, because he denies that Job is clean, innocent, and pure.

In 16:1-4, Job indicates that anybody can talk, anyone can attack. However, many need to learn the lesson, that talking, attacking does not mean that what is being said is true. In 22:6-9, Job is falsely accused by Eliphaz by saying that Job has refused financial aid to those in need. He has not helped the hungry and needy, and he has abused widows and orphans. What a falsehood!

In 19:23-29, we find one of the greatest affirmations of faith in the Bible. Job says, "I know that my redeemer lives...."

Now you understand why I said the friends of Job were no help to him, and their theology was wrong. What Job needed was love, understanding and teaching. What he got was harsh criticism. We also need to learn to mourn with them that mourn.