

JOB

Chapter 4

Eliphaz Speaks: The Innocent Prosper

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said: 2 “If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking? 3 Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. 4 Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. 5 But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. 6 Is not your fear of God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope? 7 “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? 8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. 9 By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed. 10 The roar of the lion, the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions are broken. 11 The strong lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered. 12 “Now a word was brought to me stealthily; my ear received the whisper of it. 13 Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, 14 dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. 15 A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. 16 It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: 17 ‘Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? 18 Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error; 19 how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth. 20 Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces; they perish forever without anyone regarding it. 21 Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them, do they not die, and that without wisdom?’

4:1 *Eliphaz the Temanite.* Teman was an Edomite town noted for wisdom (see Jer 49:7). The speeches of Job’s three friends contain elements of truth, but they must be carefully interpreted in context. The problem is not so much with what the friends knew but with what they did not know: God’s high purpose in allowing Satan to buffet Job. (CSB)

4:2 *ventures a word.* Eliphaz seems to be genuinely concerned with Job’s well-being and offers a complimentary word (vv. 3–4). (CSB)

impatient. Captures the idea of weariness, whether of mind, spirit, or body. Cf v 5. (TLSB)

4:5 Unexpected disaster that has come upon Job, who has lost his family, wealth, social position, and health all at once. Without warning, his life is destroyed, and he reacts with dismay. (TLSB) If Eliphaz were speaking of the final judgment of God he would be right. But in referring to the course of events in this world, he is wrong. Many innocent people have perished or suffered great misfortunes. From the earliest times until now people, even God’s people, have been cheated, robbed, beaten, killed and otherwise abused by others. We all know that the “good guys” don’t always win; too often the “bad guys” do. The book of Job emphatically teaches that suffering is not always a consequence of wrongdoing. (PBC)

4:6–7 Eliphaz counsels Job to be confident that his piety will count with God, that though God is now chastening him for some sin, it is to a good end (see v. 17; 5:17), and he can be assured that God will not destroy him along with the wicked. (CSB)

4:6 *fear of God*. Includes saving faith as well as submission to God's will. Eliphaz challenges Job to remember the relationship he has had with God up to now and the way he has lived his faith. In genuine faith, Job has lived an ethically upright and moral life, yet he is experiencing tremendous loss. (TLSB)

4:7–9 If Job is truly innocent, he will not be destroyed. (CSB)

4:7 Main point of Job's friends: bad times are God's punishment for sin. If you have not done anything wrong, you do not have anything to fear. Eliphaz has no room in his philosophy for suffering as part of God's plan for His people. (TLSB)

4:8–11 Just as the strongest lions eventually die (vv. 10–11), so the wicked are eventually destroyed (vv. 8–9). (CSB)

To support his simplistic argument Eliphaz resorted to the use of eloquence. He had better qualifications as a lecturer than as a friend (with friends like him who needs enemies). (PBC)

4:9 *blast of his anger*. See Ex 15:7–8. God's judgment is fearfully severe. (CSB)

Instrument of God's all-powerful action at creation (cf Gn 2:7) or in judgment (cf Is 30:33). Eliphaz thinks God always rewards the righteous with good things and punishes the evildoers during their earthly lives. If Eliphaz is right, then Job is trying to hide some secret sin that God is punishing. (TLSB)

4:10–11 A lion projects strength and ferocity and often serves as a symbol for the wicked (e.g., Ps 22:13, 21). God "break[s] the teeth" of these lions (Ps 58:6), and they are destroyed. Eliphaz uses this image as an illustration from nature of God's judgment and punishment of the wicked (v. 9). (TLSB)

4:12–21 Eliphaz tells of a hair-raising (see v. 15), mystical experience mediated through a dream (see v. 13), through which he claims to have received divine revelation and on which he bases his advice to Job. (CSB)

The passage has a mysterious and spooky quality apparently designed to catch and hold Job's attention. It's possible that Eliphaz felt he was not getting through to Job, so he used a different approach. (PBC)

4:12 Eliphaz relates a supernatural experience to back up his point and to add the idea that nobody is perfect. Even the righteous should expect to suffer a little because even they are not entirely without fault before God. (TLSB)

4:13 *Amid thoughts ... visions ... when deep sleep falls on men*. Eliphaz's words are echoed by Elihu in 33:15. (CSB)

4:14 *all my bones shake*. A sign of great distress (see Jer 23:9; Hab 3:16). (CSB)

4:17–21 All mortals are sinful; therefore God has a right to punish them. Job should be thankful for the correction God is giving him (see 5:17). (CSB)

4:15 *A spirit.* In his terrifying nighttime experience, Eliphaz does not identify the “spirit” (Hbr *ruach*) that brushed by his face and appeared before him. (TLSB)

4:16 *form.* In Nu 12:6–8, God tells Aaron and Miriam that He normally appears to prophets in visions and in dreams, but with Moses He speaks personally. Moses beholds the “form” of the Lord, unlike ordinary prophets. It is likely that the “spirit” of v 15 is either the Lord or an angel He has sent. (TLSB)

4:17 *can mortal man...can a man* – The question was really beside the point. Eloquently but pompously Eliphaz was talking past Job. As he sat there on his ash heap Job didn’t need to be told about the weaknesses and frailties of human beings. He realized that from his own experiences. What Job needed now was true sympathy, understanding, and comfort. He needed that badly, but so far he had received none of it from Eliphaz’s speech. (PBC)

Eliphaz makes the point that there are no human beings who can be righteous on their own before God. Eliphaz’s own reaction of terror in the presence of the Lord (or an angel) illustrates this point. But this does not really help Job or answer the more serious question: how can God justify a sinful person (9:2)? (TLSB)

4:18–19 If the angels, who are not made of dust, can be guilty in God’s sight, how much more man (see 15:15–16)! (CSB)

4:18 *servants.* Angels. (CSB)

Begins Eliphaz’s response to the revelation of v 17. God judged even the angels, the mightiest created beings known in Scripture. The Bible never reveals the reason some angels fell into sin and rebellion against God, but pride may have been their downfall (cf Is 14:12–15). (TLSB)

4:19 *houses of clay.* Bodies made of dust. (CSB)

God created man from the dust of the ground (Gn 2:7) and, after death, man returns to the earth (Gn 3:19). A clay house may not last long and is fragile, vulnerable to attacks. So, too, the human being lives only a short time in a fragile body, much weaker and humbler than angels. If God condemns the fallen angels for their sin, how much more will He condemn sinful humankind? (TLSB)

moth. A symbol of fragility (cf. 27:18). (CSB)

4:20 *Between morning and evening.* A vivid picture of the shortness of life. (CSB)

4:21 *tent.* A temporary home, like the human body (see 2Co 5:1, 4; 2Pe 1:13). (CSB)

Pulling up a tent-cord causes the whole tent to collapse. Seen from a purely human perspective, life soon ends and, like waves against sand castles on the beach, time soon erases human accomplishments and memory. (TLSB)

without wisdom. Needlessly and senselessly (see v. 20). (CSB)

