

Job 22 — The Kind Answer Built on a Lie — Eliphaz Invents Job's Crimes, Then Preaches Him a Repentance He Does Not Owe

Job 22: Eliphaz the Temanite opens the third and final round of the debate. Having run out of general theory, he abandons insinuation for open accusation — fabricating specific crimes (extorted pledges, stripped bodies, widows sent away empty, the arms of the fatherless broken) to force Job's suffering back onto a hidden sin. He closes with a genuinely beautiful call to return to God — offered, tragically, on a false footing. The land of Uz, in the patriarchal age (Job 1:1).

By chapter 22 the argument has worn a groove. Three times now the friends have circled the same claim — that suffering is the wage of sin, that a righteous man does not lose everything, that Job's catastrophe is therefore a confession waiting to be signed. Job has answered every round, and the answers have not been refuted so much as ignored. So Eliphaz the Temanite, the oldest and most courtly of the three, the one who opened the whole debate back in chapter 4 with a soft "if we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved?" — Eliphaz stands up one last time. And the courtesy is gone.

Hebrew Word Studies

tsadaq / tsaddiq (H6663 / H6662) (צָדִיק / צִדִּיק) — **to be righteous, just; the righteous one vv. 3, 19.** The verb *tsadaq* — "that thou art *righteous*" (v. 3) — is the great load-bearing word of the book, and Eliphaz has it exactly backward. He treats Job's righteousness as worthless to God, a thing that buys no pleasure and averts no suffering. But righteousness is the very thing the book is defending: Job is *tsaddiq*, the righteous one (the noun surfaces in v. 19, "the righteous see it, and are glad"), and the entire agony of the story is that a *tsaddiq* is suffering anyway. That is the scandal the friends cannot hold. Their theology can only compute righteousness as a transaction — do right, prosper; suffer, therefore sinned — so a righteous man in ashes computes, to them, as a liar in ashes. Scripture's deepest use of this root refuses the arithmetic: "the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4), and Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6) — righteousness reckoned by trust, not tallied by outcome. Job is a *tsaddiq* whose books do not balance, and the book exists to say that God, not the ledger, gets the last word on who is righteous — which is exactly what God does in 42:7.

chabal (H2254) (חָבַל) — **to bind, take as a pledge; and, by a second root, to act corruptly, to destroy v. 6.** "Thou hast taken a *pledge* from thy brother" — the verb is *chabal*, to take collateral for a debt, the ordinary machinery of poor-relief in the ancient world, which the Law hedged with mercy precisely so it could not become predation (Ex. 22:26; Deut. 24:6, "no man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man's life to pledge"). Eliphaz accuses Job of the cruel version: taking the pledge "for nought," keeping the poor man's cloak against the law of return. But the word carries a grim shadow. Hebrew has a homonymous root *chabal* meaning to act corruptly, to ruin, to destroy — the "spoilers" and "destroyers" of the prophets. To take a pledge harshly is, the language quietly says, to deal in destruction. And that is the awful mirror in this verse: the man doing the destroying here is not Job. It is the friend who is dismantling an innocent man's integrity to save a theory — taking Job's good name in pledge "for nought," and never meaning to give it back.

almanah / yathom (H490 / H3490) (אַלְמָנָה / יָתוֹמָה) — **widow / fatherless, orphan v. 9.** "Thou hast sent *widows* away empty, and the arms of the *fatherless* have been broken." Eliphaz reaches for the two figures who stand, all through scripture, as the measure of a society's righteousness — the *almanah* and the *yathom*, the widow and the orphan, the ones with no husband or father to defend them and so the special charge of God himself: "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5); "learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:17). To harm them is the signature of the wicked; to protect them is the signature of the just. Which is why the accusation is so precisely diabolical — it charges Job with the one cruelty that would most cleanly brand him wicked. And it is exactly, provably false: Job's own defense is that he "caused the widow's heart to sing for joy" and "was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame" (29:13, 15). James, naming true religion, lands on the very same pair — "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27). Eliphaz accuses the one man in the room who actually did it.

rasha (H7563) (רָשָׁע) — **wicked, guilty, criminal v. 18.** "The counsel of the *wicked* is far from me," Eliphaz says (v. 18), quoting the very disavowal he refuses to extend to Job. *Rasha* is the antonym of *tsaddiq*: the guilty one, the one in the wrong in a legal case, the criminal. The friends' entire system runs on a clean binary — *tsaddiq* prospers, *rasha* is cut down — and the tragedy of Job 22 is watching Eliphaz shove Job across the line from one to the other because the outcomes demand it. If suffering proves wickedness, then Job, suffering, must be *rasha*, and the crimes of verses 6–9 follow automatically. But the book has already told us Job is *tsaddiq*, and Job himself keeps insisting the binary is broken: "the tabernacles of robbers

prosper... into whose hand God bringeth abundantly" (12:6); "wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" (21:7). The *rasha* who flourishes and the *tsaddiq* who suffers are the two facts that shatter the friends' arithmetic — and Eliphaz, staring at both, would rather relabel Job than revise the theory. The Psalms open on the same word and the same stakes: "the ungodly [*rasha*] are not so... the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous [*tsaddiq*]" (Ps. 1:4–6). Eliphaz has the vocabulary exactly right and the verdict exactly wrong.

sakan (H5532) (סָכַן) — **to be of use, to profit; and to be acquainted with, familiar with vv. 2, 21.** The same verb frames Eliphaz's whole speech, and the frame is the argument. In verse 2 he asks whether a man can *be profitable (sakan)* to God; in verse 21 he urges Job, "Acquaint [*sakan*] now thyself with him." One Hebrew root, two English words — because *sakan* means both "to be of use, to benefit" and "to be familiar with, to know intimately." (The related noun *soken* is a steward or trusted intimate; a *sokeneth* nursed the aged King David, 1 Kgs. 1:2–4.) So Eliphaz opens by draining the value out of Job's relationship with God — *you profit him nothing* — and closes by inviting Job into relationship with God — *get acquainted with him*. He wants the intimacy without the worth; he offers friendship with the Almighty while insisting the Almighty gets nothing from you. But scripture will not let the two meanings come apart. To be *acquainted* with God is not a transaction that leaves God unmoved; it is the thing God himself desires — "I desired... the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hos. 6:6); "this is life eternal, that they might know thee" (Jn. 17:3). The invitation of verse 21 is real and good. Eliphaz has simply attached it to the wrong man's guilt — offering a blameless sufferer an "acquaintance" with God that Job already has, and that Job's friends conspicuously lack.

shalom / shalam (H7999) (שָׁלוֹם / שָׁלַם) — **peace, wholeness; and to complete, to make good, to repay vv. 21, 27.**

"Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at *peace*" (v. 21) — *shalom*, the great Hebrew word that means far more than the absence of conflict: wholeness, soundness, everything-in-its-place, the deep well-being of a life rightly ordered under God. It is exactly what Job has lost and aches to recover, and so Eliphaz's offer of it is not cruel in its content but in its *terms*. The root *shalam* runs on into verse 27 — "thou shalt pay thy vows," *shalam* meaning to complete, to make whole, to pay back what is owed. And there is the whole poison of the speech in one word-family: Eliphaz frames *shalom* as something Job must *pay* for, a peace purchased by confessing a debt Job does not owe. But the *shalom* of God is never bought that way. It is given — "the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. 6:26) — and its fullness waits on One whose chastisement, not the sufferer's, purchases it: "the chastisement of our peace [*shalom*] was upon him" (Isa. 53:5). Job cannot make himself whole by a false confession. His wholeness, and ours, comes from a Redeemer he has already glimpsed (19:25) — the one who pays the debt we could not, and gives the peace we could not earn.

From the Chapter's Architecture

It is not a chiasm, and I won't dress it as one. Job's speeches almost never are; the poetry here works by escalation and reversal, not symmetry. What the chapter offers instead is a warning about the form of false counsel — how it can wear the exact face of pastoral love, quote the exact vocabulary of the gospel, arrive with real warmth in the voice, and still be, at its foundation, an accusation God will reject. The most sobering error in the book is not Job's honest lament; it is Eliphaz's sincere, beautiful, wrong invitation. Grief that questions God faithfully (Job's) turns out to be righteous. Comfort that defends God falsely (Eliphaz's) turns out to be the thing God's wrath is kindled against (42:7). The book asks us to tell the two apart — and warns how easily we mistake which is which.