

JOB

CHAPTERS 22, 23 & 24

Introduction

It's probably not a coincidence that there was a fire here at the YMCA the very week that Job describes his afflictions as if he were gold being purified by the flames! More than one person has already suggested that we get out of the Book of Job before it's too late!!

“Fire,” or the *furnace*, is a common picture for your afflictions:

▶▶ Isaiah 48:10 See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.

▶▶ Psalms 66:10 For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

▶▶ 1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

1 Peter 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

▶▶ 1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

Job compares his afflictions to gold being refined by fire in 23:10, where he says,

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

As I was seeking to get a handle on Job's perspective regarding the furnace of affliction, I noticed something interesting. Eliphaz addresses Job in chapter twenty-two, then Job answers him in chapters twenty-three and twenty-four. Both men mention gold and God:

▶▶ Eliphaz mentions gold and God in 22:25, saying,
Job 22:25 Yes, the Almighty will be your gold And your precious silver;

▶▶ You've seen Job's mention of gold and God, in 23:10,
Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth
as gold.

Notice the different perspective: Eliphaz says God is *your* gold,
while Job says that *you* are *God's* gold.

It may seem a minor point, but it is not; it is extremely
significant when you find yourself in the furnace of affliction.

We'll see two things in our study:

#1 If God Is Your Gold, The Furnace Of
Affliction Will Embitter You

#2 If You Are God's Gold, The Furnace Of
Affliction Will Better You

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#1 If God Is Your Gold, The Furnace Of
Affliction Will Embitter You
(Chapter 22)

Eliphaz wasn't even in the furnace, but Job's afflictions were
revealing a bitterness in his soul. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were
afraid of suffering, afraid of trials; the more Job explained to them that
trials are the normal experience of the child of God, the more bitter
they each became toward Job, and the more they expressed it.

As we work through the words of Eliphaz we will encounter the
same old argument that he and Job's other two friends have been
putting forth - - that suffering is only always God's punishment of
wicked men and that, therefore, Job must be wicked and getting what
he deserved.

Job 22:1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:
Job 22:2 "Can a man be profitable to God, Though he who is wise may be profitable to
himself?

Job 22:3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous? Or is it gain to Him
that you make your ways blameless?

Job 22:4 "Is it because of your fear of Him that He corrects you, And enters into
judgment with you?

Job 22:5 Is not your wickedness great, And your iniquity without end?

Behind these words of Eliphaz is the all too common idea that “God helps those who help themselves.” Do your best and God will leave you alone to prosper; do your worst and God will quickly judge you.

God doesn't help those who help themselves; He helps those who *cannot* help themselves! The god of Eliphaz is a distant, uninterested god. Our God tells us,

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Beginning in verse six, Eliphaz levels a series of unsubstantiated accusations against Job. He has no evidence for what he says, but he concludes that it must be true since Job is suffering!

This gives us some insight into false accusations. They are the result of the person or persons making them not wanting to face the truth. In this case, Eliphaz didn't want to face the truth that the righteous suffer, because then he might have to suffer one day. So he falsely accused Job of being wicked rather than face the truth.

False accusations always fall into these two categories: Supposed social sins, and supposed spiritual sins.

▶▶ The supposed social sins are listed and described in verses six through eleven:

Job 22:6 For you have taken pledges from your brother for no reason, And stripped the naked of their clothing.

Job 22:7 You have not given the weary water to drink, And you have withheld bread from the hungry.

Job 22:8 But the mighty man possessed the land, And the honorable man dwelt in it.

Job 22:9 You have sent widows away empty, And the strength of the fatherless was crushed.

Job 22:10 Therefore snares are all around you, And sudden fear troubles you,

Job 22:11 Or darkness so that you cannot see; And an abundance of water covers you.

Job, of course, was not guilty of any of these social sins; Eliphaz believed he must be guilty, but only because Job was suffering, and suffering was only for the wicked in the mind of

Eliphaz. It's amazing how people can twist and reinvent the truth to fit their own ideas!

These are the common false social accusations: You've hurt people, you've ripped them off, you don't care for them, etc., etc. While that can be true, often it's the person doing the accusing that has the problems, but won't face them.

▶▶ The supposed spiritual sins are listed and described in verses twelve through twenty:

Job 22:12 "Is not God in the height of heaven? And see the highest stars, how lofty they are!

Job 22:13 And you say, 'What does God know? Can He judge through the deep darkness?

Job 22:14 Thick clouds cover Him, so that He cannot see, And He walks above the circle of heaven.'

Job 22:15 Will you keep to the old way Which wicked men have trod,

Job 22:16 Who were cut down before their time, Whose foundations were swept away by a flood?

Job 22:17 They said to God, 'Depart from us! What can the Almighty do to them?'

Job 22:18 Yet He filled their houses with good things; But the counsel of the wicked is far from me.

Job 22:19 "The righteous see it and are glad, And the innocent laugh at them:

Job 22:20 'Surely our adversaries are cut down, And the fire consumes their remnant.'

By the way, notice the reference in verse sixteen to the men being swept away by a flood. This is a reference to the world-wide flood of Noah, placing Job after the flood and before Moses - - probably contemporary with Abraham.

Eliphaz' point was that Job was like those judged in the flood - - defying and rebelling against God, getting what he deserved.

The only outward evidence for Eliphaz' accusation of spiritual sin was Job's suffering! Thus he was falsely accusing Job.

Be careful accusing others of supposedly spiritual sins. When you decide someone is proud or indifferent or hardhearted, you are making judgments about heart issues and you can easily be wrong - - seeing only what you want to see.

Eliphaz offers a solution to Job in the remainder of the chapter. Basically, he tells Job to purify himself and then God will reward Him:

Job 22:21 "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; Thereby good will come to you.

Job 22:22 Receive, please, instruction from His mouth, And lay up His words in your heart.

Job 22:23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up; You will remove iniquity far from your tents.

Job 22:24 Then you will lay your gold in the dust, And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks.

Job 22:25 Yes, the Almighty will be your gold And your precious silver;

Job 22:26 For then you will have your delight in the Almighty, And lift up your face to God.

Job 22:27 You will make your prayer to Him, He will hear you, And you will pay your vows.

Job 22:28 You will also declare a thing, And it will be established for you; So light will shine on your ways.

Job 22:29 When they cast you down, and you say, 'Exaltation will come!' Then He will save the humble person.

Job 22:30 He will even deliver one who is not innocent; Yes, he will be delivered by the purity of your hands."

Pray & pay are at the heart of this teaching; “make your prayer” and “pay your vows” to God and He will be obligated to reward you with material prosperity, so much that your gold will be like common dust to you.

The heart of this teaching is the declaration in verse twenty-five, “the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver.”

We might modernize it by saying, “*God is your Fort Knox!*” Pray & pay - - do religious works - - and God is obligated to reward you with health, wealth and material prosperity.

Eliphaz was wrong. It's not that God will reward you with health, wealth and material prosperity; He **is** your reward regardless your health, wealth or material prosperity!

This is why Eliphaz was embittered. He wanted no part of the furnace of affliction. The more Job sat there, a living example of the righteous suffering, the more embittered Eliphaz became at the prospects of his own suffering.

If God is your gold, the furnace of affliction will embitter you.

But,

#2 If You Are God's Gold, The Furnace Of Affliction Will Better You (Chapters 23 & 24)

Gold does not fear fire; fire only refines and purifies gold. You are God's gold, and when He turns up the thermostat, the resulting affliction will better you if you'll let it.

Of course, you don't always recognize that you're getting better! Even Job expresses bitterness initially:

Job 23:1 Then Job answered and said:

Job 23:2 "Even today my complaint is bitter; My hand is listless because of my groaning.

Chronic suffering can take its toll, both physically and spiritually. Though eventually the furnace betters you, along the way there are moments of doubt.

Job 23:3 Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat!

Job 23:4 I would present my case before Him, And fill my mouth with arguments.

Job 23:5 I would know the words which He would answer me, And understand what He would say to me.

Job 23:6 Would He contend with me in His great power? No! But He would take note of me.

Job 23:7 There the upright could reason with Him, And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.

Job 23:8 "Look, I go forward, but He is not there, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;

Job 23:9 When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.

It seems as though God has abandoned Job. Yet even here, Job knows that God is at work - - and that His silence is part of the furnace. In verse nine Job says that God is working; he just can't see what God is doing. We want so much for God to explain everything to us; but then, where would be the need for faith?

We'll return to verses ten through twelve; they summarize Job's theology of the furnace. For now, let's see how intense the heat seems to him.

Job 23:13 "But He is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does.

Job 23:14 For He performs what is appointed for me, And many such things are with Him.

Job 23:15 Therefore I am terrified at His presence; When I consider this, I am afraid of Him.

Job 23:16 For God made my heart weak, And the Almighty terrifies me;

Job 23:17 Because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness, And He did not hide deep darkness from my face.

Throughout the book, Job is convinced that God is Sovereign. Here there is a hint that God's Sovereignty is purposeful - - "He performs what is appointed for me." God, indeed, has before ordained good works for you; and He has predestined you to be conformed into the image of His Son, Jesus.

God's Sovereignty can also be terrifying in this sense: He doesn't always spare you from deep darkness!

Chapter twenty-four is Job's statement of what we all ask at some point or another: Why do the wicked prosper? The first seventeen verses ask the question, then the last eight verses answer it.

Job 24:1 "Since times are not hidden from the Almighty, Why do those who know Him see not His days?"

Job 24:2 "Some remove landmarks; They seize flocks violently and feed on them;

Job 24:3 They drive away the donkey of the fatherless; They take the widow's ox as a pledge.

Job 24:4 They push the needy off the road; All the poor of the land are forced to hide.

Job 24:5 Indeed, like wild donkeys in the desert, They go out to their work, searching for food. The wilderness yields food for them and for their children.

Job 24:6 They gather their fodder in the field And glean in the vineyard of the wicked.

Job 24:7 They spend the night naked, without clothing, And have no covering in the cold.

Job 24:8 They are wet with the showers of the mountains, And huddle around the rock for want of shelter.

Job 24:9 "Some snatch the fatherless from the breast, And take a pledge from the poor.

Job 24:10 They cause the poor to go naked, without clothing; And they take away the sheaves from the hungry.

Job 24:11 They press out oil within their walls, And tread winepresses, yet suffer thirst.

Job 24:12 The dying groan in the city, And the souls of the wounded cry out; Yet God does not charge them with wrong.

Job 24:13 "There are those who rebel against the light; They do not know its ways Nor abide in its paths.

Job 24:14 The murderer rises with the light; He kills the poor and needy; And in the night he is like a thief.

Job 24:15 The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight, Saying, 'No eye will see me'; And he disguises his face.

Job 24:16 In the dark they break into houses Which they marked for themselves in the daytime; They do not know the light.

Job 24:17 For the morning is the same to them as the shadow of death; If someone recognizes them, They are in the terrors of the shadow of death.

The wicked *do* seem to go unjudged... But not inevitably, as Job answers himself in the remaining verses of the chapter:

Job 24:18 "They should be swift on the face of the waters, Their portion should be cursed in the earth, So that no one would turn into the way of their vineyards.

Job 24:19 As drought and heat consume the snow waters, So the grave consumes those who have sinned.

Job 24:20 The womb should forget him, The worm should feed sweetly on him; He should be remembered no more, And wickedness should be broken like a tree.

Job 24:21 For he preys on the barren who do not bear, And does no good for the widow.

Job 24:22 "But God draws the mighty away with His power; He rises up, but no man is sure of life.

Job 24:23 He gives them security, and they rely on it; Yet His eyes are on their ways.

Job 24:24 They are exalted for a little while, Then they are gone. They are brought low; They are taken out of the way like all others; They dry out like the heads of grain.

Job 24:25 "Now if it is not so, who will prove me a liar, And make my speech worth nothing?"

Job realizes that both the righteous and the wicked suffer in this life; and both the righteous and the wicked prosper in this life. This is a drastically different view than that of his three friends - - but it is the correct view. Eventually, inevitably, God will judge; but for now we are left somewhat frustrated.

Ultimately the answer to Job's dilemma is to reflect upon his words in verses ten through twelve of chapter twenty-three:

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job 23:11 My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside.

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food.

God knows the way that you take; He is intimately familiar with all of the circumstances of your life. Eventually you will be in a furnace of affliction - - but only because you are His gold and He desires to purify His gold and refine it so that it is as beautiful, as valuable as is possible!

Your part is to persevere by nourishing yourself on the Word of God and by submitting yourself to the will of God.

This is very different from the perspective of Eliphaz, who saw God as *your* gold. According to Job, the reward for a faithful life is not what you get for it, but what you become by it! You are God's

gold - - and He will put you in the furnace as often as He needs to in order to see His image reflected there.

Conclusion

Warren Wiersbe points out that, when you are in the furnace of affliction, God keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. He knows how long; He knows how much.

Gold does not fear the fire; neither should you!