



Session 5: Third Cycle of Speeches

Introduction

Watch the YouTube [video](#), “Do you shut down during conflict?” by the Christian podcast, “With the Perrys.” **Explore** why her statement is true: “Shutting down can be a form of vengeance.”

Eliphaz’s Third Speech

Job 22:1–11, 21–22

Literary Background

The bulk of the middle part of the book of Job is comprised of three cycles of speeches. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar take their turn, and Job responds to each of them. Like in many emotional disagreements, each person feeds off the other, and the three cycles progressively go further downhill. You could sum up the three cycles as “okay, worse, and worst.” **In the third cycle, the speakers are realizing their arguments are going nowhere and they are just hitting their heads against a wall. So the speeches become more condensed and the people become more terse with each other. In fact, Zophar does not speak at all.**

The first two cycles of speeches from Job’s friends were about defending God’s justice with both the righteous and the wicked. After Job continued to maintain his innocence, Eliphaz is getting frustrated, and his speech takes a surprising turn. **Contrast** the first two speeches with the third by completing the thought:

1. *First & Second Speeches:* “Job, if you really were righteous as you say you are, then God would do this ...”
2. *Third Speech:* “Job, if you really were righteous as you say you are, then God would do this ...”

List the exaggerations Eliphaz makes against Job:

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Job's Response

Job 24:1–12, 22–25

Job's response could be summed up like this, "I still haven't had my hearing with God! He would not charge me with the blatant evils you say I am doing. You've told me to submit to God, but that's what I've done all along! In fact, I'm disgusted with all the injustice I see in the world. It seems like the wicked get away with it, but eventually God will judge them."

Job brings up the phenomenon of God's *delayed* justice, in contrast to his friends' emphasis on God's *immediate* justice. **Respond:** "The fact that God lets people get away with evil things for so long shows that he doesn't care."

Bildad's Third Speech

Job 25:1–6

Bildad's speech is by far the shortest speech. When arguments descend further downhill and people start to shut down, conversations typically become very repetitive. As one commentator says, "He and the others have run out of things to say to Job. Already they have become repetitious." These are the last words that Job's friends will say to him in the entire book.

Highlight themes that Bildad says that he and his friends have already said a million times before:

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¹ Robert L. Alden, *Job*, The New American Commentary 11 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 255.

Job's Response

Job 26:1–4

It is possible that Job cut off Bildad's short third speech.² Now Job personally addresses Bildad by using the second person singular "you" (in Hebrew). Job response could be summed up like this, "Such great helpers and wise counselors you are! You were praising God's dominion over all creation, but I can do that more eloquently and fully than you can."

Job's opening words are filled with sarcasm. **Read** the definition and function of sarcasm in literature below. These verses are a case in communication where "the issue isn't the issue." **What deeper things** about Job's emotional state does his sarcasm reveal?

You're probably familiar with sarcasm—it's very common in everyday life. This is the definition of sarcasm as applies to literature: "Sarcasm is a literary device in which a speaker says one thing but means another in order to ridicule or mock." People use sarcasm for many different purposes. One main purpose of sarcasm is to express feelings of frustration, judgment, and contempt. Instead of people just saying that they are annoyed or angry, sarcasm allows speakers to emphasize how upset they are about a topic or situation. Since it allows for a rich expression of emotion, writers use sarcasm to create multidimensional, emotional characters. The variety of types and tones of sarcasm allows for dynamic, engaging dialogue that helps readers understand characters on an in-depth level.³

Job's Closing Argument

Job 28:12–28

The phrase, "And Job continued his discourse" (27:1), hints that it would be Zophar's turn, but he has nothing more to say. In chapters 27–28, Job gives his closing argument to his friends. Job's response could be summed up like this, "I will never admit that you have spoken correctly or that I have done something wrong to deserve all this! I will maintain my innocence until the day I die!"

Job's final words of his closing argument are characteristic of Old Testament wisdom literature. This chapter is in the middle of the book, and in Hebrew literary style, the middle part is what is emphasized (known as a "chiasm"). **Read** the quote below. **Defend:** "Job's words here sum up the whole message of the book of Job."

² Alden, *Job*, 258.

³ Accessed from <https://www.vaia.com/en-us/explanations/english/rhetoric/sarcasm/>.

In the book's overall symmetry, the poem about wisdom stands at the center. It is a quiet interlude positioned between two cycles of heated debates on either side of it. It is apparently the author's own comment on the issue at hand. ... If chapter 28 is the pivot point of the book, a great deal more importance should be placed on it in analyzing the overall message of Job. The poem's message is, in fact, central to the book, for its theme anticipates the divine speeches. Wisdom—the understanding of why things are the way they are (and why things like Job's suffering happen)—cannot be discovered by humans. God alone possesses this knowledge and understanding. For humans, whose knowledge is profoundly limited, the essence of wisdom is to trust ("fear") God, who alone knows all things. Job and his three friends want to understand why Job is suffering; but only God knows why. And he is worthy of Job's honest and tenacious trust.⁴

Conclusion

Put yourself in Job's shoes and the shoes of his friends. When people start to shut down in combative arguments, what can you do to work past the walls they are setting up?

⁴ David Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 172.