

PART 20: CHAPTER 4, VERSES 1-6

by Rabbi Yitzchak Schwartz

Verse 1. "Then Elifaz the Temanite answered and said,"

Verse 2. "If one ventures a word to you, will you be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking?"

Verse 3. "Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands."

Verse 4. "Your words have upheld him that was falling, and you have strengthened the feeble knees."

Verse 5. "But now it is come upon you, and you are weary; it touches you, and you are troubled."

Verse 6. "Is not your fear of G-d your confidence, and your hope and integrity of your ways?"

Commentary

In our last lesson we pointed out that the standard English translation to the second verse in this chapter does not follow the interpretations of the classic Hebrew commentaries. For your convenience here is the pertinent section from that lesson.

"Both *Rashi* and the *Malbim* chose the latter meaning. According to their interpretation of the verse it should read something like this: "Were you ever tested with a (bad) thing?" That is quite different from the translators "If one ventures a word to thee..."! Of course I prefer *Rashi's* and the *Malbim's* interpretation.

The *Malbim* and *Rashi* explain that *Elifaz* is rebuking *Iyov* for failing to respond positively to the test that G-d is placing upon him. This is especially incriminating since *Iyov* had such a blessed life previous to the present tragedies that he is experiencing.

This is the first time that he experienced acute pain and loss. *Iyov's* bitter response is more fitting for one who has become worn out by extensive suffering than for one who has enjoyed a life of excessive goodness. Therefore *Elifaz* finds it difficult to hold back his words of rebuke."

There is another word in this verse that has a questionable translation- "grieved." In the original Hebrew the word "*tileh*" appears. This word is more correctly translated as tired or fatigued. In my opinion the verse should be translated something like this: "Were you ever tested with a (bad) thing? Has this one test tired you. Who can withhold himself from speaking?"

The Hebrew word for "tested" is "*nisah*". This word also means to elevate something. The purpose of a test is to elevate the one who is being tested. *Elifaz* rebukes *Iyov* that instead of rising to the challenge he has failed to pass the test and fallen from his previous level of spiritual strength. His faith has become tired instead of uplifted.

Beginning with verse 3 *Elifaz* unleashes a brutal verbal attack on *Iyov*. It was *Iyov's* custom to strengthen and comfort victims of tragedy whenever the opportunity presented itself. For the weak and weary from pain and suffering *Iyov* preached that Divine judgement may be harsh but it is always fair. Now that *Iyov* himself is the victim of pain and tragedy he changes his approach. He rejects the entire notion of Divine providence.

The *Malbim* has a very different and original interpretation for verses 3-6. According to his interpretation these verses are not dealing with the past rather with the future. The people who previously may have held *Iyov* in high esteem can now clearly see that his faith was not whole-hearted. They will learn a lesson for the future from *Iyov's* negative behavior.

Iyov's hasty condemnation of G-d's judgement and abandonment of the belief in Divine providence demonstrates his lack of spiritual integrity. People will rightfully vindicate G-d and attribute the guilt to *Iyov*. The weak in faith and those with feeble knees will exonerate G-d from any perversion of justice. They will recognize that *Iyov's* exemplary service of G-d was not without ulterior motives. Although he appeared to serve G-d with love and devotion he was actually serving himself by trying to secure his wealth, health and fame in exchange for Divine service.

According to the *Malbim* the verses should read something like this:

Verse 3. Now (that you opened your mouth with words of condemnation of G-d) your behavior will instruct many, and you will strengthen the weak hands(the weak in faith).

Verse 4. Your words will uphold him that is falling (in faith), and you will strengthen the feeble knees.

Verse 5. (Since they will see that after having been tested with tragedy only once in your life time) Now it is come upon you, and you are weary; it touches you, and you are flustered (you could not control your hasty anger for even the relative short time since your troubles began). This shows that G-d's judgement of *Iyov* is just.

Verse 6. (They will say that) your fear of G-d was (to gain) confidence (that your good lot would continue), and the perfection of your ways was in order to achieve your hope (for a good future).

The *Malbim* goes on to say that had *Iyov* kept quiet the effect on others would have been quite

different. They would have continued to assume that *Iyov* served G-d out of pure love. This would have raised some serious questions in peoples minds about the fairness of G-d's judgement.

Eventually that could lead them to entirely reject the concept of Divine providence. Now that *Iyov* hastily denounces G-d he himself will be denounced and faith in a G-d of justice will be upheld. At best anger at G-d accomplishes nothing.

Text Copyright © 1996 Rabbi Y. Schwartz and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is the Rosh Hayeshiva (Dean) of [Orchos Chaim Yeshiva](#) in Jerusalem.