

Dr. Kyle Dunham, Job, Eliphaz 1

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This is Dr. Kyle Dunham in his teaching on Eliphaz, the pious sage in Job. This is session number one, Eliphaz in the Context of Edomite Wisdom.

Hello, my name is Kyle Dunham. I am the Associate Professor of Old Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan. Today I'm discussing the book of Job and looking specifically at the role of his counsel or friends. I've done a lot of study on these interlocutors with Job and my dissertation work focuses specifically on Eliphaz, the foremost of the interlocutors.

This has been published in a by Wipf & Stock entitled, *The Pious Sage in Job*. So, if you are interested in more material behind this, you can pick up that book and look at that material as I go through the book of Job. As we come to the book of Job, it's in many ways a book that has baffled interpreters.

Many have struggled to understand the complexities of this literary masterpiece. For many readers, the intricacy of the dialogues exhibits Job's greatness and the book commonly garners literary praise. For instance, Thomas Carlyle opined that Job is one of the grandest things ever written with a human pen.

Yet the interpretive difficulties intensify when the reader attempts to assess the role, which the author intended for the three companions of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. The biblical narrative unexpectedly and succinctly reports that the friends on hearing of all this evil that had befallen Job made an appointment together to come to show sympathy and comfort to him. In fact, we read of this in Job 2 verses 11 to 13.

I'd like to just read these verses and then we'll comment on them. Now, when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place. Eliphaz, the Temanite, Bildad, the Shuhite, and Zophar, the Naamathite.

They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept and they tore the robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven.

And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights and no one spoke a word to him for they saw that his suffering was very great. The friend's abrupt appearance, not to mention their ensuing long-windedness incites the reader's curiosity to determine who they are, what they're saying, how they're supposed to be perceived and saying it, and the rationale for speaking as they do. Moreover, the

unfolding book increasingly teases the reader to understand the nature of the purported sympathy and comfort that the friends intend to deliver to their former friend.

In any such assessment of the friends, the interpretive ambiguities implicit in the primary spokesman, the interlocutor Eliphaz, quickly emerge. Eliphaz ranks as the eldest and most respected of the three companions. He's the first to speak and his speeches are longer than the others.

A number of scholars thus repute him to be a traditionalist, a warden of traditional wisdom theology, who if in any way blameworthy, little more than errors in the application of his theological principles too rigidly. Beyond this, Eliphaz has an integral, even we might say a paradigmatic role in the book as the chief counselor. His speeches provide a paradigm for the later friends as they follow him.

His speeches touch upon each of the various theodicies that are offered by the human speakers in Job. By that, we mean their efforts to reconcile suffering with the righteousness of God. Still, others criticize Eliphaz for the roughness with which he abrades Job, particularly in his later speeches.

A few cast him as a villain who wants to destroy Job at once. Some even accuse him of being inadvertently used by Satan, a diabolical tool exploited to foist Satan's deception on Job. And as we read through the book, it's little wonder that such a range of interpretations has arisen.

On the one hand, Eliphaz is among the most eloquent speakers in the book, perhaps in all of scripture. And yet Yahweh singles him out for a harsh rebuke at the end of the book. At first blush, one struggles to resolve these apparent inconsistencies.

And even as early as the Greek translation of Job in the Septuagint, interpreters of Job seem to have deliberated over the intended role of the friends. In the earliest Greek rendering of Job, the Septuagint translators appear to soften the harshness of Eliphaz and the other friends, turning him and them into kings and rendering their speeches more sophisticated than one might gather from an observant reading of the Hebrew text. Even in the New Testament, the apostle Paul appears to quote authoritatively from the sage, leading to further interpretive uncertainty.

In 1 Corinthians 3.9, Paul says, for it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness, a citation from Job 5.13 in Eliphaz's first speech. Yet, even though the apostle Paul cites Eliphaz, not all would turn out in the interpretive history of this figure. The early church seemed to treat him ambivalently, but by the Middle Ages, a very harsh reading of the first sage took hold.

And we might call this an interpretive bipolarity that ensued following the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Many criticized him as a rough counselor who was given to theological excess. But by the middle of the 20th century, Eliphaz went into what we might call an interpretive rehab.

He enjoyed something of a Renaissance among scholars of the book of Job and commentators. And this has persisted to the present day. In the 21st century, we see increasingly a number of studies that argue the author intentionally creates ambiguity with respect to Eliphaz, so that his role is meant to conjure both a negative and positive reaction.

Now, as we think about Eliphaz and his role in the book, interpretations of him have primarily fallen along two lines. The first camp sees Eliphaz as what we might call a pernicious counselor with no theological contribution. That is, he comes in to do damage to Job.

These interpreters would say that the friends were simply scoundrels who were brought in by the author of Job to provide a shallow counterpart to Job's own theology. By contrast, shows what the author wanted to emphasize as the principal tenets of the book. The friends thus are really construed to illustrate this challenge addressed by the book.

How can one reconcile the sufferings of the innocent with the righteousness of God? Typically, a corollary to this view is the understanding that the friends were wooden and static with little variety of expression and nothing really to add to the theology of the book or to its theodicy. Others, however, have taken a different line. They've seen Eliphaz as a sophisticated counselor with substantial theological contributions.

Recent studies, such as that of Carol Newsome, seek to rehabilitate the friends by perceiving more accurately the sense of moral dilemma, which the dialogue is capable of providing. Newsome observes, for instance, that the literary genre of the Wisdom Dialogue, which serves as the model for the conversation between Job and his friends, suggests that the exchange was intended to be viewed as an evenly balanced debate. Manfred Oeming likewise contends that the friends have fared badly at the hands of interpreters in spite of clues in the text that the reader ought to perceive them as true friends.

And he would say, even as good ministers. This is what Oeming says, the friends of Job set out to try numerous ways to provide relief in external and internal adversity as confidants in his contest, by reference to God and his earlier relationship to him. He goes on to say in interpretive history, they've been considered insensitive phrase mongers, pitiful comforters, who did not perceive the needs of their opponent, but rather with a dogma to protect God, gave him a whipping.

Oeming says these negative opinions I perceive as not appropriate to the text. Rather, the intention of the poem seems to be to draw them as genuine friends and good ministers. Oeming goes on to suggest three ways that the friends would have been perceived probably by the original audience as effective counselors.

First, when they come to Job at the outset, they maintain silence. They express solidarity and patience with Job, which seems to suggest they're friends and wise counselors. Second, rather than rushing in to speak, they wait for Job to offer the first word.

This kind of restrained listening, as they sit for seven days, allows Job to be the first to deliver what he has to say. After this, Eliphaz begins rather sensitively and cautiously. Third, the friends perceive one another in the ensuing debate, not just as reflectors or repeaters, but as participants in a deliberate process of exchange, whereby they're working toward a mutually satisfying resolution.

He goes so far as to say, they bring a sense of pastoral care to Job in his adversity. They do this through several means. They remind Job of the earlier theological position that he himself held to.

They give repeated references to divine promises of relief, as long as Job humbles himself before the hallowed councils of wisdom. They call to his remembrance the common property of theological wisdom, particularly relating to this idea of suffering as a means for good ends. They consistently apply this act outcome connection that's often spoken of with reference to the book of Job to provide him a safe harbor to confess his sins and seek reconciliation.

And so, on the basis of these studies, more recent scholars have attempted to view the friends, not simply as farcical caricatures of the ancient sage or as ideological simpletons, but as serious-minded, theologically sophisticated counselors and authentic companions seeking to find a resolution to Job's agony. In my own study, I've come to what I would call a composite view approach, which sees Eliphaz as the chief interlocutor, but pays more attention to the milieu from which he emerges. That is to say, in my study of the book, I've come to the conclusion he's to be viewed neither as a straw man, nor as a parodied buffoon, but rather he ties together important elements of ancient Near Eastern theodicy to suggest that Job's only way to resolve his predicament is divine appeasement.

Job has sinned, Eliphaz maintains, and now he must utilize all the resources at his disposal to bring about renewed favor from God. Eliphaz embodies the most cherished tenets of ancient Near Eastern views of suffering and divine providence. He employs all the available authoritative resources to convince Job and the others of the soundness of his principles.

However, Job's failure to acquiesce embarrasses Eliphaz primarily, along with the other friends, and ushers in a stunning and dramatic outcome at the end of the book. Previous studies of Job have really insufficiently undertaken a consistent and thorough comparison and contrast of Eliphaz and his role in speeches in the book with the ancient Near Eastern backdrop out of which his ideas materialize. And so, in this study, I conclude that Eliphaz merits a prominent place in the book as the leading proponent of the finest elements of ancient Near Eastern and ultimately of human wisdom.

So, I want to just talk for a moment about some of the ways in which this study helps us to situate Job better in the context from which the book likely emerges. There have been insufficiencies in previous approaches to Job that a thorough study of Eliphaz in the ancient Near Eastern backdrop can rectify. First, the prior approaches have not really understood Eliphaz in terms of his reception history.

Understanding the diverse ways in which Eliphaz has been read in history helps us to avoid predictable pitfalls as to how we should read him, whether in one extreme or another. If we go back all the way to the Septuagint, we realize that from the very beginning, interpreters have struggled to make sense of how Eliphaz functions in the book. Second, I would suggest that previous examinations have failed to explore fully the implications of his Edomite provenance.

The principal characters in Job are likely Edomite. Job is from Uz, Job 1:1, a land probably identified with Edom, southeast of Palestine or Canaan. And Eliphaz is from Timan, as Job 2:11 tells us.

This is a locality bordering Edom proper and associated with Edom and Edomite wisdom. Edom was renowned for its wisdom and the bearing that this wisdom tradition has on Eliphaz's theological outlook and role have not been thoroughly explored. Recent studies of the Edomite dialect and Edomite inscriptions shed additional light on the religious and wisdom context from which Eliphaz and the others emerged.

And so, in my study, I interact with some of this material. Third, an overly restrictive view of the wisdom sources from which Eliphaz constructed his theological response has hampered approaches to Eliphaz. For instance, scholars have often cast him as a narrow-minded proponent of Deuteronomic retributive theology.

This approach, however, is anachronistic and fails to appreciate the multifaceted sources and perspectives from which Eliphaz draws. And I think part of this is understanding, again, the ancient Near Eastern background materials, which helps us. And so forth, understanding his role against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern theodicies.

There are a handful of these that are extant, helps to situate Eliphaz in the wider Mesopotamian wisdom tradition. These works that have been compared to Job have been studied on the macro level. That is to say, looking at the book of Job as a whole and looking at these other ancient Near Eastern parallels.

These would be works such as the Babylonian Theodicy, the Tales of the Righteous Sufferer, Ludlul bel nemeqi and others. However, these studies have not undertaken a thorough consideration of how in many of these works, the sufferer interacts as in the book of Job with a chief counselor, a chief interlocutor. And this role in the book of Job is fulfilled by Eliphaz.

In other words, what hasn't been studied sufficiently in the past is how in these ancient Near Eastern works, in almost every case, the righteous sufferer interacts with a friend intending to lead him to resolution. This also occurs in the book of Job, but often studies in the past haven't sufficiently interacted with how then the original audience might have expected Eliphaz to function and perform his role in the book. So, these have implications for how we should read Eliphaz as the principal sage.

Finally, if we put together these insights, we'll get a better understanding of the book of Job as a whole. If Eliphaz and the other friends are expected in the tradition of ancient Near Eastern wisdom theology to lead Job to repentance and reconciliation with God, and yet fail to do so, this underscores a significant purpose for the author of Job. By means of this ineffectiveness, the author of Job is presenting or emphasizing the failure of traditional ancient Near Eastern theological perspectives to solve the deepest questions of suffering.

These are questions still asked by many today. So, although Eliphaz brings forth the expected counsel of the wise, the biblical author of Job demonstrates his counsel is ultimately flawed. The righteous sufferer may not fully resolve the tensions inherent in the dichotomy between his or her plight and the scriptural emphasis on the goodness and sovereignty of God.

From this perspective, one realizes that the book of Job functions as a remarkable counterpoint within the biblical wisdom writings. Although Eliphaz embodies the highest achievement and most profound perspectives of human wisdom in the ancient Near East, his outlook remains in the end, merely human. God's solution, on the other hand, is marked by counterpoint.

In the book of Job, as in history, God has the last say. Eliphaz as an advocate of appeasement is a foremost ancient theological legalist who seeks to attain righteousness before God by humanly rather than divinely prescribed means. As a legalist foreshadowing the Mosaic law, Eliphaz exhibits religious and theological traits that are endemic to humanity since the fall.

Yet as with Adam, with Cain, with others from the very origins of human history, Eliphaz's improper means of attaining righteousness with the offended God culminates in failure. The book of Job and the events and speeches outlined demonstrate to readers within religious communities, significant truths about sin, suffering, righteousness, and divine providence that provide, even for us today, grist for theological and sustained, thoughtful and sustained theological reflection. But they also provide solace for the despairing believer.

Through the book's vigorous characterization and portrayal of God, who directs and sustains creation. By understanding his role in the book, one fully comprehends the divine benevolent providence, which directs the details of life for God's people. So, before getting to those lofty grandeurs, we must first understand how the ancient readers viewed Job and therefore Eliphaz as literary figures and sages within their traditions.

Who is Job? The name Job is mentioned twice in the Old Testament outside the book that bears his name in Ezekiel 14 verses 14 and 20. There Ezekiel presents Job as an ancient paragon of faith. He says, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would deliver, but their own lives by their righteousness declares the Lord God.

The name Job also appears in the pantheon of heroes lauded in the apocryphal wisdom writing, Ben Sira, which says this, for God also mentioned Job who held fast to all the ways of justice. The writing there seems to depend on Ezekiel. In the New Testament, the apostle James presents Job as a model of exemplary endurance.

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. The personal name Job is attested widely in inscriptions from the second millennium BC in Akkadian, Assyrian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic. It appears, for example, in the 14th-century Amarna letters, in an Amorite inscription from Alak, in the 19th-century execration texts from Egypt, and in several Ugaritic texts, including a 13th-century list of palace officials.

As to the meaning of the name, many have suggested a meaning of enmity or to display enmity based on some cognates and an alleged congruity between the name Job, 'oēv, and the term for enemy, 'oēv. Those who support this connection point to texts like Job 13:24, in which Job accuses God of being his enemy. And they argue that almost certainly the original readers of Job would have understood this meaning.

However, David Clines has suggested, and I tend to follow his lead in this, that the provenance and meaning of the term might be tied more closely to Ugaritic cognates. Ugaritic evidence would suggest the etymology of the name comes from a

compound of two words, *l*, meaning where, and *of*, which would be a theophoric constituent. In other words, it would reflect the divine father.

There's a similar name, *ayaku* in Ugaritic, which means, where is my brother? And therefore, the name Job would mean, where is my divine father? Clines suggests that if this is the case, then the very mention of the name Job is a plea for divine help. And I think there are some connections to Northwest Semitic, which tend to lead me in this direction. Now, where does Job come from? There are two main theories.

Job 1:1 tells us he hails from the land of Uz and the two principal traditions are either that that is located in modern Syria or in ancient Edom or Arabia. Some argue that the connection is to be made to Syria. This is on the basis of an ancient Assyrian inscription, according to some of the writings of Josephus and other archaeological finds.

Barton argues that Uz was located in modern-day Syria. And he bases this on an Assyrian inscription from the ninth century from Shalmaneser II. But looking more closely at the biblical data, it appears that the evidence for the Assyrian provenance is more tenuous than the alternative.

And it seems to point rather in the direction that the principal characters in Job are Edomite. That Uz is to be identified with Edom, Southwest of Canaan or Palestine follows from several factors. First, the patronym Uz is found in the Edomite genealogy of Genesis 36, verse 28.

Second, Uz is linked to Edom by means of poetic parallelism in the Old Testament. For instance, in Lamentations 4:21, the author says, rejoice and be glad O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz or Uz. It seems that the author here identifies the Edomites as those who dwell in that land.

Third, most of the names in the book of Job appear to have an Edomite origin. For instance, Eliphaz features prominently in the Edomite genealogy of Genesis 36. Fourth, Eliphaz, who is Job's primary interlocutor comes from Timan, a region subsumed under Edom proper in several passages, such as Ezekiel 25 and Amos 1. These are also areas associated with the Edomite kingdom and Edomite wisdom.

Edom and Timan were renowned for their wisdom and they're associated both in biblical texts and extra-biblical texts as perpetuating a profound wisdom tradition. The term Timan is used about 20 times in the Old Testament and it generally denotes territory in the South. The name Timan came to be associated with one of the descendants of Esau in the book of Genesis, namely a tribal chieftain of his clan.

We see this in Genesis 36:15 and 42. More specifically, he's the grandson of Esau and the son of Eliphaz, who is Esau's firstborn. It is apparent that the names of Edomite chieftains came to be associated with the regional precincts of the Edomite territory.

And so, this would make a strong case for identifying Eliphaz and Timan and the related toponym or the place name as denoting territory, which was in fact, Edomite. As to the two most prominent territories of Edom, Timan is paired in biblical prophecy with Basra, denoting the region of Timan as most likely the Southern district of Edom and Basra as the chief city of the Northern district. So, for instance, in the book of Amos, Amos prophesies concerning Yahweh's verdict, I will send a fire upon Timan and it shall devour the strongholds of Basra.

Ezekiel 25 links Timan with Dedan, another region of Edom. It says there, thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom and cut off from it man and beast. I will make it desolate from Timan even to Dedan, they shall fall by the sword.

In several biblical passages, Timan is identified with Edom itself, particularly in its association as a source of renowned wisdom. In Jeremiah 49.7 and 20, the prophet Jeremiah foretells doom for the celebrated wise men of Timan, a region which has come to refer by synecdoche to all of Edom. Jeremiah says this, concerning Edom, thus says the Lord of hosts, is wisdom no more in Timan? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished? He goes on then to pronounce Edom's utter demise.

Therefore, here is the plan that the Lord has made against Edom and the purposes he has formed against the inhabitants of Timan, even the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away. Surely their fold will be appalled at their fate. Obadiah has the harshest words for Edom, likewise decreeing the ruinous fate of these arrogant cliff dwellers for their complicities and the sacking of Jerusalem and their aid to rounding up the Israelite deportees.

Moving beyond the biblical text, even in the intertestamental period, we see a reference to this connection between Edom and wisdom. In the Jewish apocryphal writing Baruch, Timan, and Edom are linked as repositories of wisdom. It says this in chapter three, verse 14, learn where there is wisdom, where there is strength, where there is understanding, so that you may at the same time discern where there is length of days and life, where there is light for the eyes and peace.

And then goes on to offer several examples of where wisdom is found. Her wisdom has not been heard of in Canaan or seen in Timan. A link there again to Timan and Edom and its wisdom tradition.

Two other reasons that Job and his friends seem to be connected to Edom would be the appendix to the Septuagint translation of Job, which includes a lengthy edition in

which Job and his friends are characterized as kings of Edomite origin. In this appendix, the translator writer says this, these were the kings who reigned in Edom, which country he also ruled over first Bela, the son of Beor, but after Bela Jobab, who is called Job and after him Husham. This reference to Jobab forms a connection to the Edomite genealogy of Genesis 36.

In Genesis 36, the descendants of Esau are given as Bela and then Jobab, which suggests that the early translators connected Job to the Edomite people. So then if that's the case, if it's true that Job and his friends were likely Edomite, is it possible that we can derive any understanding of Edomite wisdom that might help us to better understand the nature of the wisdom they give in the book? In other words, is there anything about Edom that might help us to better situate them in the context from which they emerge? We want to look at this and try to determine if we can understand anything about Edom that might help us in this regard. According to the biblical record, Edom had an established monarchy prior to the advent of the kingship in Israel.

Genesis 36 tells us; these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites. Although it's possible that Moses is writing proleptically, commentators often here see an editorial comment. The biblical summary of Edom's monarchy suggests that early in its history, it had sufficient political organization and societal cohesion to support to some degree, the origin and dissemination of wisdom materials, which were the common stock of the ancient Near East.

And it seems that Edom had quite an extensive interaction with the world powers of its day. For instance, the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II appears to have cataloged the theophoric names of Edomite chiefs in his topographical lists at the temple of Karnak. Other ancient Near Eastern sources that also help us in this regard would be two obelisks discovered at Tanis that date from the 14th century BC.

And they imply an organized if not somewhat formidable, Edomite culture. The Southern Stele of those two proclaims victory over the Libyans and Nubians, while the Northern Stele pronounces the following. It says, fierce raging lion, who has laid waste the land of the Asiatic nomads, who have plundered Mount Seir with its valiant arm.

William F. Albright noted about that that around 1300 Mount Seir was already sufficiently threatening to be raided by an Egyptian army. Interesting in this regard is the Anastasi Papyri, which also talks about the nomadic tribes of Edom. This dates from the reign of Sethos II in the 13th century, and it indicates the Edomites were partly sedentary.

It refers to them as a foreign land rather than as a foreign people. Lastly, a reference from the Papyrus Harris, which dates from the reign of Ramses III in the 12th century mentions the nomadic Seirites. He says I brought about the destruction of Seir among the tribes of the Asiatic nomads.

I laid waste their tents. Edom was located in a prime location in the commercial avenues of the ancient Near East. It was situated along the King's Highway and it was central in the flow of traffic and commerce that took place in the ancient world.

The King's Highway was the second most valuable trade route internationally in the ancient world. It passed through the Edomite hill country of the Trans Jordan area. It provided a direct link between Egypt and Damascus.

The flow of both trade ideas and religion would go right through the path of Edom. In this case, Edom was a primary gateway to the ancient business centers, as well as given exposure to the many cultures and societies of its day. In fact, many suggest that the rivalry between Israel and Edom grew bitter in time over the struggle to control these Arabian trade routes, to which Edom by its location had natural access.

It's important to note that along with trade and commerce, written materials were also being passed along with religious texts. For instance, we find that the Gilgamesh epic dating back to at least the 14th century has been discovered in several locations, quite a distance, including in Ammar in upper Syria and Megiddo in Canaan. Furthermore, there's a cache of Kassite-type seals that have been discovered in Greece.

This suggests that there was a wide interchange of cultures and religious ideas. This is substantiated in the book of Job by one of the questions Job asks in response to Zophar. He asks, have you not asked those who travel the roads and do you not accept their testimony? The reference suggests access to commercial roads and contact with other peoples and cultures who would be traveling along these roads, businessmen, and religious observers.

So, in light of this, how then can we situate Edom in the context, not only of its geographical position but in the context of its religious connection to these other cultures? One of the questions that we have to ask is why are there so few tangible written evidences of this renowned Edomite wisdom? There's a scarcity of inscriptions and this has led some to suggest we should abandon altogether any attempts to formulate a synthesis of Edomite wisdom. There are several possible responses to this. Some have suggested that the primary exemplars of Edomite wisdom have in fact been incorporated into the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

This was suggested by Robert Pfeiffer in the early 20th century. The difficulty with this, however, is it's somewhat theologically careless. It relegates inscripturated

revelation as originating outside the boundaries of God's special covenant people, the nation of Israel.

The New Testament specifies that the Jewish people were the recipients of God's special revelation as inscripturated in the Old Testament canon. They had a special role as the mediatory people who were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Another view is that rather than incorporating Edomite materials into the Old Testament, when the people of Edom were destroyed as prophesied by Jeremiah and Obadiah, they were so fully obliterated that no inscripturated evidence was left in the wake of that destruction.

Some have suggested that this is the case. Others have suggested that perhaps we're simply looking in the wrong place. That is to say, in understanding the similarities between ancient Semitic languages, it's possible that Edomite inscriptions have been misidentified.

This is the approach taken by some who have argued that Edomite inscriptions have been wrongly classified as Hebrew or Moabite in the past. And so, some have taken this approach to it. In trying to put this all together, the best way to understand the theological contours of Edomite wisdom is to look at the few materials that seem to attest to its wisdom tradition and to try to put these together into a synthesis of what they held to.

The scholar who has most fully done this is Robert Pfeiffer, who in the early 20th century, spent a lot of time arguing about the nature of Edomite wisdom. He, in fact, argued that when you look at the Old Testament, there are certain books that seem to display certain portions of scripture, a similar ethos, or a similar approach to certain tenets of theology. For instance, he would argue that the last two chapters of Proverbs, Agur, and Lemuel, have significant affinities with the book of Job, as with certain other Psalms in the Psalter.

And so, he argues that in putting these together, we can try to surmise what Edomite wisdom would have consisted of. While there are some weaknesses in Pfeiffer's approach, it seems that he is on the right track, that there was in fact, a wisdom consensus in ancient Edom. And we can find aspects of this, even in the Bible.

First, there's this emphasis on the legendary wisdom of Edom in passages like Jeremiah 49 and Obadiah. And this is remarkable because Edom was considered an enemy of Israel. And even though they were Israel's enemies, the biblical text shows that they were regarded and renowned for their wisdom.

Another factor is that Solomon is said to be wiser than all the sons of the East. Pfeiffer takes this to be an overt reference to the Edomites because Job is considered

the greatest of the sons of the East. Third, Pfeiffer, as I said, argues that certain passages of scripture reflect this Edomite emphasis.

We could go to Proverbs 30, Agur, sometimes called the Job of the book of Proverbs. We could go to Psalm 89 and Psalm 88 and other places. Lastly, Pfeiffer adds to this hypothesis by seeking to contrast what he called Jewish theology with Edomite theology in Job and in Proverbs.

He contended that Edomite wisdom was pessimistic and agnostic, that it viewed the human law as toil with no hope of retributive reward or punishment. God was considered remote and unconcerned with human affairs, absolutely sovereign and transcendent. In my work, as I've examined some Edomite wisdom passages and other things, I came to the conclusion that we might summarize Edomite wisdom as incorporating three tenets.

The first was that God was a fearsome God. God was the God who induces fear. For instance, many have argued that the God of the Edomites was a God of nature who was terrifying and mysterious.

To really understand that though, we first have to look at what did the friends say and how they said reflected that or didn't reflect that. The Edomite God in the extant literature that we have was known as Kos. We see this reflected in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, where Edomites outside the nation of Israel have the theophoric name Bar Kos, meaning son of Kos.

And so, some have argued, if we understand the nature of Kos, that will better help us to understand the nature of the Edomite religion and the Edomite approach to God. One author who has recently interacted with this is Lawrence Zalcman. He argues that the best way to understand the Edomite God Kos is to relate it to the Hebrew word kotz, the Hebrew word kotz, which he translates to feel a sickening dread.

If this is the case, the word kotz and therefore Kotz would signify the dread that comes upon someone as a result of this supernatural experience. Zalcman compares this etymology to the epithet for God given in the book of Genesis in chapter 31, the fear of Isaac, which there is used to describe Yahweh. Later in the passage, Yahweh is described simply as fear when Jacob swears by fear of his father, Isaac.

If Zalcman's proposal is correct, this has implications for the wisdom theology of Eliphaz, the chief friend. Eliphaz would also then subscribe to a deity who induces dread. In Job 4, Eliphaz vividly describes a visionary experience that he has.

And this is intended, it seems to be regarded as special revelation from God. In outlining what he saw, he talks about the dread that this mysterious being induced. His portrayal is striking in verses 14 and 15.

He says this, dread came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair of my flesh stood up. Twice Eliphaz uses the term dread as a noun and a verb to describe the terror, which the deity induces along with the synonym trembling to describe his psychosomatic response.

Throughout the speeches, Eliphaz exhibits a marked preference for the term dread or fear to describe religious experiences in which the divine is felt or sensed. This terminology is helpful as Eliphaz delineates his retributive doctrine that the wicked assuredly experienced the dismaying presence of God in judgment. In his second speech, Eliphaz uses the term to denote that the wicked person is visited by divine retribution when the sounds of dread or terror are in his ears.

And then finally, in his third speech, he talks about the dread and terror that have overtaken Job as an evildoer. He says, therefore, snares are all around you and sudden terror overwhelms you. So, God is a God of fear.

The second tenet I would describe this way, God is distant. He's utterly transcendent. He's over and above the created order.

Eliphaz emphasizes this as well in his speeches. In his retelling of the dream vision, the spirit who gives him revelation, emphasizes the vast chasm between God and man that allows no mortal to attain righteousness with God. For instance, he says, can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his maker? Even in his servants, he puts no trust, in his angels he charges with error.

This divine transcendence is so great, that not even the celestial angels are free from corruption. In his second speech, Eliphaz reiterates the content of this dream vision concerning the reprehensibility of mortal man because of God's absolute separation from the created order. Mankind is loathsome.

He says in Job 15, what is man that he can be pure? He that is born of a woman, that he can be righteous. Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones and the heavens are not pure in his sight. How much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water.

Divine transcendence touches upon also divine incomprehensibility for Eliphaz. In the latter half of his first speech, Eliphaz portrays God as largely undiscernible to mankind. A God who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.

By his third speech, this becomes even more pronounced. Since God has no concern for the affairs of humanity, human efforts are of no value to him. In Job 22, Eliphaz says, can man be of benefit to God? Can even a wise man benefit him? What pleasure would it give the Almighty if you were righteous? What would he gain if your ways were blameless? And this lack of concern for human affairs proceeds from this utter divine remoteness or distance.

He says in chapter 22, verse 12, is not God high in the heavens? See the highest stars, how lofty they are. For Eliphaz, God is far removed from the material universe. God remains utterly transcendent and largely unconcerned with human affairs.

And then finally, the third tenet would be this, that God is a retributive God. God is capriciously retributive. Eliphaz and the other friends posit a deity who is capricious in his dealings with man.

Although sometimes inconsistent in the application of these principles, Eliphaz in the main pontificates upon a God who as a cosmic justice meter rewards man according to divine whims. For instance, in chapter four, Eliphaz portrays the evildoer as one who is destroyed by the breath of God and consumed by the blast of his anger. God is the all-powerful arbiter in human affairs who arbitrarily meets out punishment or blessing at the dictates of his will.

Eliphaz says he wounds, but he binds up, he shatters, but his hands heal. God's material blessing and destructive punishment issue forth, not from his divine character, so much as from whether or not God takes umbrage at man and his conduct. The evildoer is punished in chapter 15 because he has stretched out his hand against God and defies the Almighty.

Nowhere is this linked to the divine moral character, rather it's an act of brute will. In the third speech, Eliphaz propounds that the wicked are punished because they said to God, depart from us. And what can the Almighty do to us? In this way, submission to the sheer power of God is the highest good.

Whereas rank evil is to defy and oppose the divine will. For Eliphaz, God is a retributive God, but the retribution fails to issue from divine moral character. It's rather simply a force of his will.

So then having analyzed the contours of Edomite wisdom, we're in a better position to understand the role and tenets of Job's friend as they relate to the purpose of the book. Their counsel is grounded in the misguided and ultimately failed attempt to force Job to recognize that a terrifying, utterly transcendent and capriciously retributive God has punished Job in fitting proportion to his sins. Job must acknowledge these sins and repent.

If he does so, according to Eliphaz and the other friends, he will regain God's favor and be restored to his previous fortunes. A significant feature of the book, however, is to subvert these retributive approaches to discerning the designs of God's providence. God is sovereign, free, and gracious as the book attests.

He cannot be forced into this simplistic cause and effect. Thus, the book exhibits the dark side of wisdom. These are scenarios when the general principles of Proverbs fail to account for the realities of a fallen world.

More will be said about this as we tackle the next part. In the next segment, we'll look at Eliphaz, particularly through his speeches, as he seeks to bring Job to a place of divine appeasement to recognize and repent from his sins. I'll suggest that he fails to do so.

At the end of the book, he is rebuked in a way that helps us to understand better what the book is trying to accomplish and what the function of Eliphaz is in the book. So, I invite you to join us for our next segment as we look at Eliphaz, particularly in the context of his ancient Near Eastern wisdom theodicy.

This is Dr. Kyle Dunham in his teaching on Eliphaz, the pious sage in Job. This is session number one, Eliphaz in the context of Edomite wisdom.